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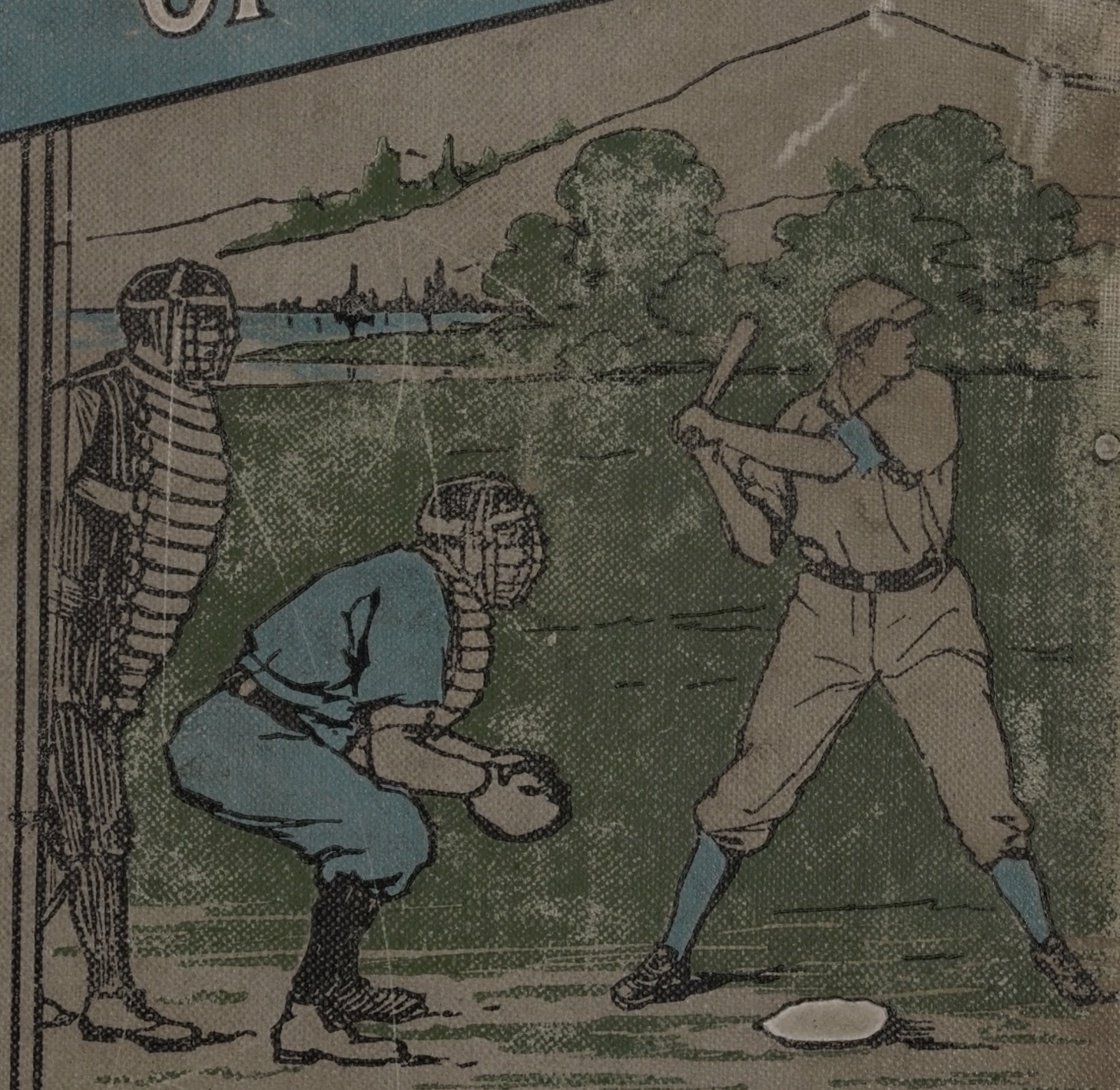

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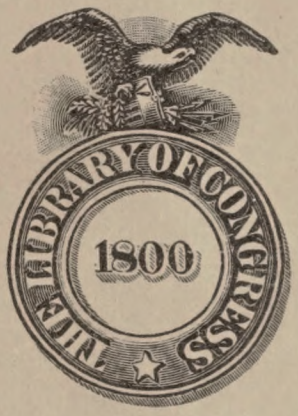

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LAKEPORT SERIES

The Baseball Boys of Lakeport

OR

The Winning Run

By EDWARD STRATEMEYER

Author of "The Gun Club Boys of Lakeport," "The Boat Club Boys of Lakeport," "Dave Porter at Oak Hall," "Colonial Series," "Old Glory Series," Etc.

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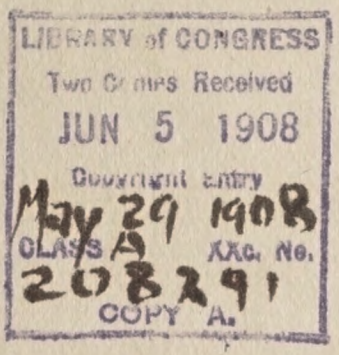

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The Baseball Boys of Lakeport.

PREFACE

Although a complete tale in itself, this story forms the second volume in a series devoted to sports in the forest, on the water, and on the athletic field.

In the first volume of the series, entitled, "The Gun Club Boys of Lakeport," I took some boys of Lakeport into the depths of the forest during the winter months. Here, in company with a trusted old hunter, they succeeded in bringing down game of various kinds and in learning many of Nature's secrets which, in the past, had been unknown to them.

With the coming of summer the thoughts of the boys turned to baseball, and it was not long before an amateur nine of no mean ability was organized. Challenges were both sent out and received; and in this volume a number of the games played are described in detail. The rivalry, as in all small

towns, was of the "red-hot" variety, and the particulars are also given of a plot to injure the Lakeport nine and thus make them lose the most important game of all.

Baseball is pre-eminently an American game and as such will probably remain the leading athletic sport of village, town, city, school and college for years to come. It is not such a rough game by far as football, the individual plays, good and bad, are more readily followed, and because of these points it should be encouraged at every opportunity.

The writer of this story is a good deal of a baseball "rooter," and consequently the penning of the tale has been more of a pleasure than a task. Many of the plays described are such as I have myself seen on the diamond. In a few instances team work which would do credit to a professional nine is mentioned, but such mentioning is in strict conformity to facts.

EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

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THE BASEBALL BOYS OF LAKEPORT

CHAPTER I.

A BALL GAME ON THE GREEN.

"WHAT a beautiful afternoon for a game of ball, Fred!"

"Right you are, Joe. Let us see if we can't scare up some of the other fellows and have a game," returned Fred Rush.

"I know Harry will be glad to play—he spoke about a game this morning," went on Joe Westmore. "Have you that new ball of yours handy?"

"Right here," and Fred brought it forth and tossed it high in the air. "Go and get your bat and hurry up about it. If we can scare up enough fellows we can play sides."

"All right, you go after Link Darrow and Bart

Mason and I'll tell Frank Pemberton and Paul Shale. My! but can't Paul run!"

"Run? Well, I just guess. He's the best runner in Lakeport. Say, if we organized a regular baseball club, he'd make a dandy base runner, wouldn't he?"

"What put organizing a regular baseball club into your head, Fred?"

"Oh, I don't know. They have a regular club up to Brookside, and one over to Camdale, too. We ought to be able to support a club as well as those places."

"That's exactly my idea." Joe Westmore paused for a moment. "I think we could get up a better team here than that up to Brookside. I don't know much about the fellows at Camdale."

"If we organized a regular club we could send out challenges to those other clubs and have regular contests."

"If we did that we would have to fix up a regular ball field."

"That would be easy. I know father would let us use the ten-acre lot back of the milk station. We

could build a little grand stand, and have things in real city style."

"If we went that far we'd want uniforms, too."

"We'd have to save up for the uniforms—or else take up a collection. I guess my father would give something. He used to love baseball when he was a boy—and he likes to look at a game still."

"So does my father like it. He used to be a pitcher on his town club. It would just be grand if we could get up a real good club, and fix up those grounds with a stand, and get uniforms and gloves, and masks and those things, and have a clubroom somewhere——"

"Phew! but you've got it all cut and dried, Joe."

"We can do it—I know we can," answered Joe Westmore, confidently. "Some of the boys laughed at us last winter, when we started to organize our gun club. But the plan went through, and——"

"We had the best outing in the woods any set of fellows ever had," finished Fred Rush. "Do you know, I shall never forget our camp on Pine

Island," he went on. "What a lot of sport we did have! If this baseball club would afford as much sport——"

"It will."

"Then I'm in favor of it this minute. But come on, let us have our game first and talk club afterwards," added Fred, and ran off in one direction while Joe made off in another.

Fred Rush was the son of a hardware dealer, whose establishment was located in the thriving town of Lakeport, situated at the foot of Pine Lake. Fred was a stout youth, with a round, ruddy face. He was generally bubbling over with energy and good humor and numbered a host of friends among those who knew him.

Fred's closest chums were Joe and Harry Westmore, the sons of a local flour and feed dealer. The Westmores were fairly well to do, and had recently come into possession of valuable land near the head of the lake.

As already intimated, the three boys had, during the previous winter, organized the Gun Club of Lakeport, the doings of which organization

have already been set down by me in another volume, entitled, "The Gun Club Boys of Lakeport." With an old hunter named Joel Runnell they set out for Pine Island, located near the head of the lake, and there spent several weeks in hunting and trapping game, and in fishing through the ice. During a part of the outing they had had with them two of their fellow members, Link Darrow and Bart Mason, and also a young Irish lad named Teddy Dugan. Some of their adventures had been perilous, but all had ended happily, and when they had returned to Lakeport with their game the success of the gun club had been the talk of the town for several weeks.

"Those boys are all right," was the comment of Mr. Paxton, the postmaster. "I reckon a lot of other young fellows wish they had been along."

"Well, I wish I had been there," Paul Shale had answered, and in this declaration he had been joined by Frank Pemberton, Walter Bannister, Matt Roscoe, and half a dozen other lads of Lakeport, who had hung fire about going.

The outing in the woods had been productive of

one very important result. A dishonest real estate dealer of Brookside had been claiming some land which rightfully belonged to the Westmore family. On the island the young hunters had picked up some legal documents which proved the Westmore claim, and Hiram Skeetles, the real estate dealer, had been made to right the wrong done. Skeetles had had as his friend a bully of Lakeport named Dan Marcy. When the exposure came the real estate dealer departed for parts unknown. But Dan Marcy was more brazen, and as soon as the talk over the affair subsided he returned to the vicinity of Lakeport, to begin his bullying habits as of yore. So far he had not bothered the Westmores and Fred Rush, but the time was coming when he would do so, as we shall presently see.

Joe found his brother Harry working over some photographs which he had been printing. Harry owned a good snap-shot camera, and during the outing in the woods had taken a number of really fine photographs, one of which had been enlarged and now hung framed in the parlor.

"Give it up, Harry!" he called out. "Fred

wants us to play ball. I'm going to drum up some of the other fellows and he is going to do the same."

"All right, just as soon as this picture is finished," answered Harry, who was just a year and a day younger than his brother. "Isn't it a dandy!" and he held up the print in hand. It represented all of the young hunters and old Runnell in front of the campfire, each with a gun, ax, or kitchen utensil in his hand. "I'm going to send it to Aunt Laura. She asked me for it."

"Those were surely gay old times, Harry. But hurry up—we don't want to keep the others waiting."

Joe ran off, to find Frank Pemberton and Paul Shale, who lived but a short distance away. He found them trying their skill at long jumping.

"Come on, fellows, we are going to have a game of baseball!" he cried. "Harry and Fred are coming, and some of the others, too."

"Whoop! That's me!" ejaculated Paul Shale. "There, beat that if you can, Frank!" And he made an extra long jump down the garden path.

"Not to-day," laughed Frank Pemberton. "Your legs are too long for me. But I think I can beat you at playing ball," he added.

"Can you? Come on and see," answered Paul, and running up to the picket fence he cleared it at a bound. Frank had to go around by the gate, and then both boys joined Joe on his way to the field where the ball game was to come off.

When they arrived, they found Fred already there, with Bart Mason and Link Darrow. Harry was also coming up, with several others, including Teddy Dugan, who chanced to be in town on an errand for his father.

"Sure an' I love baseball, so I do!" cried the Irish boy, with a twinkle of his eye. "It's meself as is goin' to be a professional pitcher when I grow up."

"Good for Teddy!" cried Link Darrow. "Just wait till he's the leading pitcher in the regular league at ten thousand a year, won't he be some pumpkins?" And a laugh went up.

"Are they after payin' a ladin pitcher ten thousand a year?" asked Teddy, curiously.

"To be sure, Teddy," answered Bart Mason. "And when they travel he gets the best room in the hotel, and turtle soup every day for dinner."

"And a gold medal every time he strikes out a man," added Fred.

"And a diamond if he hits the umpire in the eye," came from Joe.

"Now you're pokin' fun at me!" grumbled the Irish boy. "Just the same, I'm going to be a pitcher some day," he continued, brightening. "Mike Leary once pitched for the Red Stockings, of Pittsfield, an' they paid him five dollars the game. 'Twas easy money, my dad said."

All told, twelve boys had assembled, and it was speedily settled that they should choose sides, with Fred and Joe as leaders, one having furnished the bat and the other the ball. Fred's first choice of a player was Harry, while Joe took Bart, and the other choices followed rapidly. A game of five innings was arranged, with Joe's side first to the bat.

"Here is where you go out in one, two, three

order," said Fred, as he stationed himself behind the home plate. He had put in Harry as pitcher and Frank as first baseman. "Harry, don't you favor Joe, even if he is your brother!" he called out.

"No favors granted or expected!" sang out Harry. "All ready?"

"Ready," answered Joe, who was the first player up.

With care Harry sent the ball in, but it was too high and Joe did not strike at it.

"One ball!" cried out the youth who had been selected as umpire.

Again the ball came in. This time Joe struck at it and missed it.

"One strike!"

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed Fred, as he threw the ball back to the pitcher.

Again Harry made his calculations with care. But Joe was on the alert and as the ball came in just where he wanted it he met it fairly and sent it sailing down to centerfield.

"Hurrah, first blood!" yelled Bart. "Leg it,

Joe!" And Joe did "leg it" for all he knew how and reached third base in safety.

"Hi, there, stop up!" called out Harry, ruefully. "Don't try to make a home run the first thing."

"Never mind, I'll put him out at the home plate," said Fred, but he failed to do so, and Joe came in when Bart made a safe hit to first base.

Thus the game went on until the beginning of the third inning, when the score stood 7 to 7.

"Sure an' it's a foin game, so it is!" cried Teddy Dugan. "It's a real baseball club Lakeport ought to have, wid yourselves as mimbers."

"Perhaps we shall have a club," answered Joe.

Link was at the bat, and after he had made a safe hit to second, Harry followed.

"Here comes Mr. Jadell," remarked Frank. "See that you don't hit him, or there'll be a row."

Mr. Montgomery Jadell was the principal of the Lakeport school. He was a fussy old gentleman, who wore a high, silk hat on all occasions and big, gold-rimmed spectacles. Only a few of his pupils liked him, and the majority of the lads spoke of him as Old Stovepipe behind his back. He was a

bachelor and had a maiden sister named Angelina who kept house for him.

"Old Stovepipe is going to walk right across the ball field," came from Paul. "Guess he is in a hurry to get home." And evidently the schoolmaster was in a hurry for he scarcely gave the boys a look as he passed those in the outfield.

Harry let one ball pass him and then the sphere came in just where he wished it. Taking a step forward he swung around the bat with vigor. There was a sharp crack! and away flew the ball over the pitcher's head and out toward centerfield.

"Hi! hi! look out!" yelled several voices at once, and the player in centerfield started to catch the ball. But before he could do so, it landed fairly and squarely on the school principal's high hat, crushing in the top of the silk tile and sending Mr. Montgomery Jadell flat on his back on the grassy field.

CHAPTER II.

HARRY GETS INTO DIFFICULTY.

"Gracious, Harry, that's the time you did it!"

"Old Stovepipe's hat is ruined forever!"

"I'll bet he's madder than a nest of hornets!"

So the talk ran on, as Harry cast away the bat and hurried down into the field. In the meantime Mr. Montgomery Jadell had scrambled up and was bending down looking for his spectacles, which had fallen off.

"Here are your glasses, sir," said the boy who was playing centerfield, as he picked them up and handed them over.

"You—you young rascals!" gasped the school principal. "What do you mean by attacking me in this—this atrocious fashion?"

"Oh, Mr. Jadell, I didn't mean to hit you!" called out Harry, as he came up.

"Ah! so it was you who threw the ball at me, eh?" And the teacher glared savagely at the boy.

"I didn't throw it. I was at the bat and when I hit the ball it flew in this direction."

"Humph! it amounts to the same thing." Mr. Montgomery Jadell felt of his somewhat bald head. "Whe—where's my hat?"

"Here it is, sir," answered the fielder, and picked up the battered headgear.

"What!" The principal gazed at the hat in consternation. "The—the—yes, the top is knocked out! Oh, you young villain! How dare you do such a thing!"

"I hadn't the slightest intention of hitting you or the hat, Mr. Jadell."

"Ha! don't tell me! I know better! Do you know, sir, that that hat cost me six dollars?" The school principal was rather a close man and six dollars meant much to him.

"Well, I suppose I'll have to get you another," answered Harry ruefully. He wondered where he was to obtain the money.

"You will certainly have to do that, young man.

But that is not all. Do you think I am going to allow you to attack me in this fashion? No, indeed!"

"As I said before, it was an accident. I——"

"Nonsense! I know better, Westmore. You are angry at me because I made you stay in yesterday and the day before, and I presume in your way you thought you'd get square."

"No, sir, I——"

"Don't contradict me, young man, don't contradict me! I know! You shall pay for the hat; and I'll settle the rest of the matter in school tomorrow!" And thus speaking, Mr. Montgomery Jadell stalked from the field, leaving the whole crowd of boys staring after him in wonder.

"Isn't he a peach, though?" came softly from Link. "He's the meekest man I ever met."

"I guess I've put my foot into it," groaned Harry. "Ten chances to one he'll tell father I did it on purpose."

"Well, we can prove that you didn't," put in Fred.

"He had a right to watch out fer himself, when

he was crossin' the field," came from Teddy Dugan. "He knew he might be hit."

"That's a fact," said Bart. "Strictly speaking, it was his business to keep off the field."

A number of the village folks, including several men, had gathered around to watch the game and all agreed that Bart was right.

"This green is a playground," said one of the men. "The schoolmaster should have kept away from it."

The game was resumed and although Harry had lost much of his interest, he managed to play his position creditably and when the five innings were finished the score stood 11 to 12 in favor of Fred's side. Fred himself had made two of the runs and Harry had made three. By this time it was dark, and the boys lost no time in scattering for their homes.

"We'll certainly have to organize a regular baseball club," said Fred to Link, "and the sooner the better."

"Well, I'm in for it," answered Link. "I'll tell you where we can have our clubroom? On the top

floor of my father's carpenter shop. We might have had our quarters up there last winter only it was too cold. But it will make a dandy place during the summer."

"That's worth remembering, Link. Let us tell the other fellows, when we get together again."

As Joe and Harry hurried homeward they talked over the affair of the ruined silk hat.

"How much money have you saved up, Harry?" asked his brother.

"A dollar and fifty cents."

"I've got the same. That makes three dollars. I don't think the hat cost more than that. Besides, it was old."

"He said it cost six dollars."

"Oh, bother! Well, if it did, you'll have to ask father for the rest of the money—or mother."

"I'd like to know if he went down to the store and told father," went on Harry, uneasily.

"Oh, I guess not."

But Joe was mistaken; Mr. Montgomery Jadell had lost no time in making his way to the flour and

feed establishment run by Horace Westmore. He had found Harry's father busy over the books.

"How do you do, Mr. Jadell," had been Mr. Westmore's pleasant greeting. "What can I do for you?"

"Please to look at that hat, Mr. Westmore!" And the article was slammed down on the counter.

"Dear me! You've had quite an accident."

"Accident?" snorted the school principal. "No accident at all, sir. Your boy Harry did that, sir."

"Harry?"

"That is what I said, sir."

"How did he come to do it?"

"It was done deliberately, with a baseball, just because I kept him after school yesterday and the day before."

At this answer Horace Westmore's face grew stern. He thought much of his sons, but he expected them to behave themselves.

"You are sure of this, Mr. Jadell?"

"I am, sir—positive."

"I am sorry to hear of this. I will question Harry as soon as I go home."

"He has got to buy a new hat," continued the teacher.

"I will see that he does so—if it was his fault, as you say."

"Aren't you willing to take my word for it, Mr. Westmore?" fumed Montgomery Jadell.

"I'd like to hear what my son has to say. You are sure it was not an accident?"

"I am—and he must get me a new hat very soon!" grumbled the school principal, and stalked out of the store exactly as he had stalked off of the ball field. He was very set in his ways and never willing to listen to another person's side of a story.

When Joe and Harry returned home they had several chores to do, and having finished these they washed up for supper. They had scarcely finished when their father entered.

"Harry, Mr. Jadell has told me a pretty bad story about you," said Mr. Westmore. "What have you to say for yourself?"

"It was purely an accident, father," was the

youth's reply, and told of the affair exactly as it had occurred.

"You are sure that you did not intend to hit him?"

"I did not."

"He was in very bad humor over it."

"He is always in a bad humor lately," put in Joe.

"Why did he keep you in yesterday and the day before, Harry?"

"Because I talked to Link Darrow once and because I dropped the big dictionary on the floor. The reason I spoke to Link was because he had my history and couldn't study without the book. I tried to explain to Mr. Jadell, but he wouldn't listen."

"Hum!" Mr. Westmore mused for a moment. "You seem to have gotten into hot water all around. You'll have to get the teacher another silk hat."

"I'll do it."

"Have you got the money?"

"I've got some, and Joe is going to lend me

some,'' answered Harry, evasively. He did not wish to ask his parent for a loan just then.

''Very well; you settle with the teacher and I'll say no more,'' said Mr. Westmore, and sat down to the supper table. He thought that by letting Harry pay for the damage done he would be teaching the boy a valuable lesson.

''You got off rather easy after all,'' remarked Joe, when the meal was over, and he and his brother had gone out into the yard. ''But you've got to settle with the teacher next, and raise the money for the hat. Where are you going to get that other three dollars?''

''Oh, I'll raise it somehow,'' answered Harry. ''But if Old Stovepipe tries to make an example of me to-morrow I'm not going to stand for it, I can tell you that!''

''Why don't you go down to Mr. Carew's store and find out just how much such a silk hat is worth.''

''I'll do it.''

Joe had some work to do for his mother, so Harry went on his errand alone. Mr. Carew's

establishment was of the department store variety, with one part devoted to shoes, another to hats, and another to general furnishings.

"So you want to find out the price of a silk hat?" said the storekeeper. "Want it for yourself, I suppose," and he laughed at his little joke.

"No, Mr. Carew, I want one for Mr. Jadell. I spoilt his to-day and I want to get him another like it."

"Oh, yes, my clerk was telling me about that. Well, I reckon I can fix you up."

"What is such a hat worth?"

"Well, the regular price was six dollars, but as it was a bit out of style I let Mr. Jadell have it for five."

"Can you get me another like it?"

"To be sure. I've got the mate right in my case now—same style, size and all."

"Then please keep it for me until I come for it."

"When will you come?"

"To-morrow, if I can, or else the day after."

"Very well, I'll keep the hat for you," answered the storekeeper.

CHAPTER III.

A BIT OF A MYSTERY.

During his walk home Harry pondered in his mind the question of how to raise the remaining two dollars with which to pay for the silk hat. He did not wish to ask his parents for the amount and he felt reasonably certain that neither of his sisters possessed that sum.

"I've got to raise it somehow," he told himself. He thought of Fred and his other friends, but shook his head. Every one of the lads spent his money about as fast as he received it.

On the following day Mr. Montgomery Jadell appeared at the school with another silk hat—one he had been wearing years before. He lost no time in calling Harry up to his desk.

"What do you and your folks propose to do about my hat?" he asked, coldly.

"I have already ordered another hat from Mr. Carew," was Harry's answer. "He says it will be exactly like the one that was ruined. I shall have it in a day or two."

"Oh, very well. Now go to your seat and see that you behave yourself," and Harry went, glad to get away thus easily. During all of that day the principal watched the boy closely, but Harry was on his guard and took care not to do anything for which he might be censured.

After school the majority of the boys went off to play ball and other games, but Harry slipped away by himself and did not get home until supper time.

"Where have you been?" asked Joe.

"Oh, I've been out about that hat," answered Harry, and would say no more.

"The boys are talking baseball club stronger than ever," said Joe, a little later. "Fred has an idea we could get up a fine nine if we tried."

"Well, if we want a good nine for this summer we'll have to get together pretty soon. It takes lots of practice to make a nine work together—and that is what counts, they tell me."

"To be sure it does. No matter how good individual players are, if they can't play in harmony they are sure to botch a game. Frank was telling me that the Brookside fellows are in practice already. George Dixon is captain of the club."

"He's a good batter."

"Yes, and a good shortstop, too. Roy Willetts is their pitcher. They tell me he can pitch a swift ball."

"And who is going to catch for them?"

"Little Ike Gass."

"What, that midget?"

"He's small, but he is a good one, so they say. I wish we had the club organized," went on Joe.

"Well, the only way to do is to go ahead and get the fellows together, Joe. Why not issue a call for, say, next Saturday afternoon?"

"That is what Fred suggested. But as we want to hold the meeting in Link's father's carpenter shop I suppose we ought to get Link to issue the call."

On the following day they talked the matter over with Fred and Link, and as a consequence a

call was issued to about a dozen boys to come to the "clubroom," as it was designated and help organize the Lakeport Baseball Club.

"I'll have the upper floor of the carpenter shop in order by that time," said Link. "Father said we could fix it up to suit ourselves, as he isn't going to use it again until next winter."

"I'll help you fix it up," said Fred. "Just wait till we get going and have a little money in the treasury! We can have pictures on the wall and all sorts of athletic things—punching bags, boxing gloves——"

"Our first money will have to be spent for bats, balls and uniforms," came from Bart Mason. "The Brooksides have uniforms. We don't want to be behind them."

"Well, I guess not!" ejaculated Joe. "If the Lakeport Baseball Club can't have things as good as Brookside it had better go out of business!"

"Exactly what I say," was Fred's comment.

After school that afternoon Harry went to Mr. Carew's store and purchased the silk hat for the school principal.

"You are certain this is exactly like the other hat?" he asked, as he paid for the purchase.

"Yes, Harry—the two hats came out of the same box, as the saying goes."

"I don't want to have any trouble over it—I've had trouble enough."

"I guess Mr. Jadell is getting the best of the bargain. His hat must have been pretty well worn by this time."

"I suppose it was. But as I couldn't present him with a secondhand hat I had to get this new one," answered Harry, and left the store with the headgear in a box. Not caring to take it home he walked directly to the teacher's house with it.

"Is Mr. Jadell in?" he asked of Angelina Jadell, who came to answer his ring at the front door.

"He is not."

"Well, here is a new silk hat for him, to replace the one that was damaged a couple of days ago."

"Oh! Are you the boy that knocked my brother's hat from his head?"

"Yes."

"It was a wicked thing to do."

"It was done by accident, Miss Jadell."

"Oh, that's what any boy would say. If I'd been in my brother's place I should have had you arrested." Miss Jadell took the box. "Is this hat as good as the other?"

"Mr. Carew said the two were exactly alike. Kindly give it to Mr. Jadell and tell him Harry Westmore brought it," and without waiting for a reply the boy turned and hurried away.

"I suppose it's paid for?" called Miss Angelina after him, shrilly.

"Yes, it's paid for, and you won't have to give up a cent for it!" cried Harry, half angrily. "Oh, my, what an old maid!" he murmured to himself. "How I would hate to have her keeping house for me! No wonder Old Stovepipe is so crabbed!"

Harry and Joe went over to the carpenter shop that day after school and assisted Link in cleaning up the place. This was no mean task, for the upper room was full of shavings, bits of boards, and sawdust. They had also to pile up some sawhorses and put a number of tools in their proper

places in a big chest. This done they swept up and dusted and fixed up an end of a carpenter's bench so that it could be used for a table.

"Now, I guess we are ready for the meeting," said Link, after the task was finished. "I wish we had some good pictures of baseball games to hang on the walls."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," answered Joe. "I'll write to the dealers in baseball supplies for catalogues of their goods and also ask them for advertising pictures. Maybe they'll be glad to send 'em along."

The news had circulated that our young friends were going to organize a baseball club, and, as was to be expected, it became the talk of the town. Many of the lads were very enthusiastic, but others, who had not been invited to attend the first meeting, "stuck up their noses" when the matter was mentioned to them.

"That club won't amount to a hill of beans," said one of the big boys, a lad named Voup. "Why, the Westmore boys can't play ball a little

bit, and that Fred Rush is too stout to do anything on the diamond."

"Well, why don't you organize a club then, Si?" asked one of Voup's cronies.

"Maybe I will," answered Silas Voup. "If I do, will you join, Sid?"

"To be sure I'll join," came from Sidney Yates. "Say, wouldn't it be great if we organized a club and knocked the spots out of the other club," he added, earnestly.

"Reckon we can do it. I could pitch and you could catch, and we could get Longback Muggs for shortstop. That Westmore crowd wouldn't be in it with us."

"Right you are, Si! Let us organize by all means. We can meet in my father's carriage house." And then and there Silas Voup and Sidney Yates laid their plans for organizing a rival club to defeat the other organization. It may be added here that both Voup and Yates belonged to the aristocratic branch of the Lakeport community. They considered themselves a trifle superior to the other boys, and spent a good deal of their pocket

money for cigarettes and pool playing. Their arrogant manners were the cause of the Westmores and Fred Rush leaving them severely alone.

Joe was the first to go home from the carpenter shop, and as soon as he appeared his mother sent him down to his father's store for a bag of flour. When the youth arrived at the store he found his parent very much exercised over something.

"What's the matter, father?" he questioned.

"I've lost some money, Joe," was the unexpected answer.

"Lost some money? How much?"

"Ten or twelve dollars—I can't exactly tell which. I had the bills in a tin box on the back desk and now the box is gone."

"Perhaps you put the box in some other place?"

"I've looked about every place I can think of. No, the box must have been stolen. The desk is so close to that back window anybody could have reached in and taken it."

"When did you put the box there?"

"A couple of days ago. The bills were on the old Lumberville Bank and had your Grandfather

Anderson's signature on them, and I was going to show them to your mother."

"Was there anything else in the box?"

"Yes, an old society pin I used to wear years ago. That's gone, too."

"When did you see the box last?"

"I can't remember, exactly—I've been so busy. But I am certain I put it there two days ago. I ought to have put it in the safe," continued Mr. Westmore.

The two hunted around the store, but could find no trace of the missing box. The desk upon which it had rested was but a few feet from an open window, and outside was a narrow alleyway running to a back street.

"Somebody must have come into the alleyway and taken it," said Joe. "You didn't see anybody?"

"Not a soul. I sent Harry out there yesterday to pick up the rubbish."

"Harry?" Joe mused for a moment. "Did—did Harry know the box was there?" he asked.

"I suppose so. By the way, what about that hat he was going to get for Mr. Jadell?"

"He got it and took it over to Mr. Jadell's house."

"Did he pay for it?"

"I suppose so. He didn't want to say much about it." Joe's heart began to beat rapidly. "Oh, father, you don't think——" he began.

"I guess I'll ask Harry if he saw the box," returned Mr. Westmore, shortly. "You had better run home with the bag of flour. Your mother may be waiting for it."

CHAPTER IV.

HARRY'S SECRET.

On his way home Joe's thoughts were very busy. He well remembered that Harry had wanted two dollars more with which to pay for the silk hat. The hat had been bought. Where had his brother procured the needed sum?

"I'll never believe he took the box—never!" he told himself, over and over again. "Harry is too honest for anything of that sort."

He wanted to ask his brother about the two dollars as soon as he arrived home, but, for some reason, could not bring himself to do so. He told his mother about the missing box and she became interested immediately.

"Some sneak thief must have taken it," she said. "I declare, Lakeport is not as safe a place to live in as it used to be."

"I saw that box when I was down to the store,"

said Harry. "It was not over three feet from the window."

"Did you see anybody in the alleyway?" asked Joe.

"No," answered Harry, and then he turned away to bring in some wood for the wood-box. He had his arm full of sticks when his father came into the yard.

"Harry!" called out Mr. Westmore. "Wait a minute; I want to speak to you."

"Yes, sir," and the boy stopped short.

"I want to ask you about that hat you bought for Mr. Jadell. Did you pay for it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you get the money?"

"Why—I—I—had some and Joe lent me some," stammered Harry and turned red.

"How much did Joe lend you?"

"A dollar and a half."

"What did you pay for the hat?"

"Five dollars."

"Did you have the other three dollars and a half saved up?"

"No, sir, but—but—oh, father, I wish you wouldn't ask me about it!" cried Harry, in confusion.

"How much did you have saved up?" demanded Mr. Westmore, sharply.

"A dollar and a half."

"Then where did you get the other two dollars?"

"Why, I—oh, please don't ask me, father. I—I——"

"Harry, I want you to answer me." Mr. Westmore's tone was very stern. "Did you touch the tin box on the back desk at the store?"

Harry stared at his father in perplexity for a moment. Then he dropped the wood, one stick after another.

"Me touch that box?" he said, slowly. "*Me?* No, sir, I didn't touch the box! I—I—father!"

The last word was full of fear—fear that he was being suspected by his own father of being a thief. But Mr. Westmore did not notice.

"Then where did you get that two dollars? Answer me."

"I—I got it—and I never touched your old box!" came in a jerk from Harry. "You—you're mean to suspect me, mean!" And he ran back to the wood-pile and then to the barn. Here he came to a halt, his breath coming hard and fast. His cheeks were burning and his mind was in a whirl.

"To think I took his money!" he muttered. "That *I* took it! Oh, what a shame! I'll never, never——" He could not finish. "What will mother say?" And then the tears came into his eyes.

Mr. Westmore was a stern man, but he loved his sons and in the past he had trusted them implicitly. He started to enter the house, then reconsidered the matter and followed Harry to the barn. Here it was so dark he could scarcely see.

"Harry!"

No answer came back, and he repeated the call several times.

"Go away and leave me," came from the corner where the feed box was located. "I—I don't want you to—to speak to me!"

"Harry, let us talk this over." Mr. Westmore's

voice was unusually kind. He walked over to the feed box. "You are doing wrong to fly into such a passion over this, my son."

"You think I—I took that box?"

"No, I don't think so. You said you didn't touch it, and I have always believed you."

"But you think I got the two dollars from the box."

"No, Harry. But don't you think I have a right to know where you do get your money? If you came by it honestly—and I don't think anything differently—you ought not to be ashamed to tell me where you did get it. I only ask because I feel it is my duty to know what you are doing."

To this Harry did not answer.

"Of course, if you wish to keep the matter a secret, you can do so. But, it seems to me, that you are not treating me exactly as you should," went on Mr. Westmore. "I am doing my best by you, giving you a good home and a good education, and allowing you to have plenty of sport, and—"

"Well, father, I'll tell you the whole thing," interrupted Harry. "But—but I wish you wouldn't

tell the others. They may laugh at me." His anger was fast dying out. "I went and put my camera in pawn, over to Camdale. The pawnbroker, Mr. Levy, lent me three dollars on it. I've got the pawn ticket in my pocket."

At this declaration Mr. Westmore smiled broadly, although Harry could not see him, owing to the darkness. There was something comical to him in Harry putting up his precious camera in order to raise money with which to buy the school principal a new silk hat. Had it not been for hurting his son's feelings he would have laughed outright.

"I see," he answered. "Why didn't you come to me for the amount?"

"Why, I—I didn't think you'd care to give it to me."

"I don't like a member of our family to patronize a pawnbroker. To-morrow I'll give you three dollars and you can go and get the camera back."

"Oh, thank you, father! And you won't say anything to the others about it?"

"Not a word, Harry."

"You're a good old dad!" cried the boy, and

clasped his hand gratefully. "I—I guess I was a chump not to tell you the whole truth from the start," he added.

"It would have saved this misunderstanding, Harry. But come, supper must be waiting."

"I'll get the wood in in a jiffy," said Harry, and ran to the wood-pile once more. Soon he had all he could carry, and his father came after him with several heavy sticks.

"I can't make out who took that box," said Mr. Westmore later on to his wife and family. "Harry didn't see anybody in the alleyway and neither did I or Johnson." Johnson was an old man who worked at the store.

"You can be thankful you didn't lose more," said Mrs. Westmore. "Was the society pin worth much?"

"About three dollars. I think I'll have the blacksmith put up some iron bars over that window. Otherwise a thief could get in there some time and rob the store," went on Mr. Westmore.

Joe was glad to see that his father did not suspect Harry. He wondered where his brother had

procured the rest of the money, but came to the conclusion that Harry had borrowed it from some of his school chums.

Laura Westmore, who was a little younger than the boys, had been invited to take a sail on the lake by a gentleman who owned a fair-sized yacht. She now came back from the trip, which had lasted for three hours.

"We had a delightful time!" she ejaculated, "and I'm as hungry as a bear. There were eight of us, and we sailed up the lake for several miles, and Mr. Felding let me handle the tiller part of the time. And what do you think? We passed a small sloop, the *Vixen,* from Rudd's Landing, and who do you think was on board? That big, overgrown bully, Dan Marcy."

"Dan Marcy!" cried Joe and Harry, simultaneously.

"So that good-for-nothing young fellow has come back to these parts," put in Mr. Westmore. "I was in hopes that Lakeport had seen the last of him."

"I heard that he was back several days ago,"

said Mrs. Westmore. "Mrs. Darrow mentioned it. Said he looked pretty well run down and seedy."

"He was just horrid," went on Laura. "When his boat came up to us he called out, 'How do you do, ladies?' just as if he was a close friend."

"I hope you didn't answer him," said Joe.

"Indeed I didn't, and neither did the other girls. Mr. Felding told him to keep off or he'd run into us. Marcy didn't like that, and when he sailed away he yelled after us, 'Think you're all some pumpkins, don't you? Well, I reckon I'm as good as any of you!' "

"His impudence always was monumental," was Harry's comment. "If he comes back to Lakeport he has got to learn to keep his distance."

"If I were you, boys, I should have nothing to do with him," came from Mr. Westmore. "He is a bad egg, and if you give him half a chance he will be sure to make trouble for you. Better not notice him."

"Well, he has got to let Laura alone," said Joe.

"If he bothers Laura I'll attend to him myself," answered Mr. Westmore.

CHAPTER V.

ORGANIZING THE CLUB.

PROMPTLY on time on the following Saturday the boys who had been invited to do so gathered at Link Darrow's place and mounted the stairs leading to the second floor of the carpenter shop.

"This is all right!" exclaimed Walter Bannister, as he gazed around. "Somebody must have worked hard to get this clubroom into shipshape."

"Yes, but we have got to work harder yet to get the club into shape," put in Fred. "This is going to be no go-as-you-please affair. If we form our club and then let the clubs from other towns defeat us—why, we'll never hear the end of it, that's all."

"Who's talking defeat already?" demanded Bart Mason. "Anybody who says defeat ought to be put out."

"That's the talk!" cried Paul Shale. He swung himself up on the end of the big carpenter's bench. "We are going to win every game we play."

"Bully for Paul!" came from Matt Roscoe. "Nothing like tooting your horn, even if you haven't any fish to sell."

"Here's a bouquet for you!" sang out Matt, and threw a block of wood at him. "Now then, what's the first thing to do anyway?"

"The first thing to do is to behave yourself," answered Link.

"All right, I'll say nothing and saw wood," said Frank Pemberton, and went through the motion of sawing.

"Now let up, all of you!" burst out Joe. "This isn't a negro minstrels——"

"Great Cæsar! he takes us for coons," interrupted Matt. "Ma beloved brefren, dis am an outrage!" he added, in negro dialect. "I'se gwine to pass an amendment to de Constitution dat——"

"If you open your mouth again I'll vote to take you down in the back yard and duck you in the cistern!" came from Fred. "Really, fellows," he

Organizing the club.

continued, calmly, "let us settle down to business."

"That's it—to business!" cried half a dozen. "We can have our fun after the meeting is over."

"Well, what is there to do?" questioned Frank, after a pause.

"I move we make Link Darrow temporary chairman," came from Bart. "It's his clubroom."

"Second the motion!" came from Fred.

"All in favor raise their right hands," said Joe, and every hand went up instantly.

"Teacher, can I go out?" came softly from Matt. "I dropped my chewing gum out of the window."

"As chairman of this meeting I fine Matt Roscoe five cents for that interruption," said Link. "All fines can go towards equipping the club."

"Oh, dear! that's where I put my foot into it," grumbled Matt. "I shan't open my trap again."

"It seems to me that the chairman needs a gavel with which to keep order," said Frank. "Here you are," and reaching down into a nearby tool chest he brought forth a large wooden hammer. A

roar of laughter went up, and Link had to pound for silence, which he proceeded to do with vigor.

"A baseball club needs a captain, a secretary and a treasurer," said Link when the boys were all attention. "Nominations for a captain, who shall also act as president, are now in order."

"I nominate Joe Westmore," came from Fred promptly.

"I nominate Link Darrow," came from Joe.

"I decline the nomination," answered Link. "I'm going to vote for Joe."

"So am I," put in Frank. "I don't know enough to be captain."

"I second the nomination of Joe Westmore," came from Paul Shale. "He is the fellow for the place, boys," he added, earnestly. "He knows more about baseball than any of us."

"Any more nominations?" asked Link, gravely.

There was a moment of silence.

"Let us make Joe's election unanimous," suggested Frank.

"That's the talk!" was the cry. "Hurrah for

Captain Joe Westmore, of the Lakeport Baseball Club!"

"Gracious me!" gasped Link. "I forgot! We ought to have organized the club first. We don't know who is a member and who isn't yet."

"Oh, we're all members," came from Bart. "I guess it's carried that Joe is our captain," he added.

"Yes," said Link. "Joe, come up and take the chair."

"Thanks, but I don't see the chair," said Joe, gravely, and this brought forth a laugh. "Fellow members of the Lakeport Baseball Club, I thank you for the honor you have done me, and——"

"Thank you, Joe, you can treat to ice-cream some other time," interrupted Matt. "Much obliged just the same."

"I was going to say, we now need a secretary and a treasurer. Nominations for secretary will first be in order."

There was a little wrangle over this, but finally Bart was selected for the position, as he was a good and rapid writer. Then Fred was elected

treasurer. After that Link was made steward of the club.

"What does the steward do?" asked Link.

"Keeps the clubroom in order and holds the key to the same," answered Frank.

"Oh! Well, you fellows have got to help keep the place clean, and you'll find the key to the shop on a nail in our wash kitchen," answered Link.

A set of by-laws were drawn up and the initiation fee was placed at twenty-five cents, which each boy promised to pay in on the following Saturday. A committee was also appointed to see what could be done towards raising money for suits and also for the other articles which would be needed. It was decided to go into regular practice every day after school hours, and the various positions of the players were not to be assigned to them until after Captain Joe could determine what were each player's strongest and weakest points.

"I am going to show no favors," said Joe, soberly. "I am going to do my level best—not only for the sake of the club, but also for the sake of our

town. We have got to do all we can to beat the Brookside Club, and likewise the clubs from Camdale and other places."

"The Brookside fellows are mostly larger than we are," came from Paul.

"Even so, we must beat them if we can."

"Of course we are going to play only amateur nines," said Bart.

"To be sure. We'd stand no show at all against professionals," answered Harry.

Altogether twelve boys had joined the club, but several of these were not overly enthusiastic and were quite willing to be placed "on the bench," as it is termed, as substitutes. The first meeting was declared a great success, and all of the boys went home feeling that Lakeport was to be represented by a real baseball club at last.

"I don't know where we are to get our initiation fees," said Joe to his brother. "I don't suppose you've got any money left?"

"Yes, Joe; father lent me a little," answered Harry. He was glad of a chance to mention the fact.

"Oh!"

"I can let you have fifty cents," and Harry brought out that sum and handed it over.

Sunday passed quietly, the majority of the boys going both to church and Sunday-school. So far Harry had had no chance to get back his camera and he resolved to go after it on Monday, directly after school.

"I've got an errand to do," he told Joe. "You'll have to get along without me on the ball field," and he hurried away before his brother could question him.

It was a long walk to Camdale and Harry was glad enough to "get a lift" on a farm wagon that happened to be passing, the turnout being driven by Andy Dugan, the father of Teddy, already introduced.

"Ride be all means, me lad," said Mr. Dugan. "Sure an' 'twill save shoe leather if nothin' more."

"Thank you, Mr. Dugan."

"It's me son Teddy was tellin' me ye are gittin'

up a baseball club,'' went on Andy Dugan, as he whipped up his horse.

''Yes.''

''Sure an' ye be great boys. First it was the Gun Club an' now it's a Baseball Club. Well, if ye have as good luck wid ball playin' as ye had wid huntin' sure an' it will be foin.''

''Did you ever play ball, Mr. Dugan?''

''Jest wanct, lad, jest wanct. It was in the old toimes when they hit a feller to put him out. I was runnin' fer me loif from base to base whin the ball took me in the schmall av the back an' bowled me over loike a noine pin. That give me enough av the game, an' I ain't played since.''

''They don't hit the players with the ball any more.''

''I know that same, Harry, but I'm too old for the game anyway. It's Teddy might make a good player. If ye want an extry hand better give him a trial.''

''I'll remember that, Mr. Dugan.''

On the outskirts of Camdale the two separated and Harry made his way to the pawnbroking es-

tablishment of Moses Levy. It was located on a side street, between a saloon and a clothing establishment.

"Vell, mine young friend, vat can I do for you to-day?" questioned the Jew, coming forward and rubbing his hands.

"I want to get my camera back," answered Harry, briefly, and surrendered his ticket with the money.

"Ah, you didn't need dot monish long, did you?" said Moses Levy, as he shuffled back to get the pawned article.

"No."

"You vos more fortunate dan most people. Here you are. Shall I wrap it up?"

"No," said Harry, and, turning on his heel, he started for the door.

"Ven you vants anudder loan ton't forget Moses Levy," said the Jew. "I alvays treats you right."

Once outside of the shop, Harry paused to make certain that the camera was in the same condition as when he had placed it in pawn.

"Hullo there, Harry Westmore, what are you doing in the pawnshop?" called out a voice close by. A young man had come from the saloon and was gazing at the boy in curiosity.

Harry looked up and saw the bullying face of Dan Marcy. The fellow was shabbily dressed and was puffing away at a cheap cigar.

"My business is none of your business, Dan Marcy," said Harry, sharply, before he had stopped to think twice.

"Oh, you needn't get high-toned," sneered the bully.

"If you don't like my manner don't talk to me."

"Think you are big just because you and your crowd tricked me an' Skeetles at Pine Island, don't you?" continued Dan Marcy, drawing closer. "Just let me tell you that I ain't forgettin' that!"

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind what I mean—I ain't forgettin' it, that's all."

"You had better keep your distance. If you don't my folks will have the law on you, Dan Marcy!"

"Humph! you can't scare me, Harry Westmore. I'm coming back to Lakeport soon, and then I'll show you what I can do!" muttered the bully, and then he turned and walked away.

"What a miserable creature he is," thought Harry as he started for home. "It's too bad that he is coming back to Lakeport. I suppose he can make a whole lot of trouble if he sets out for it."

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE LAKE.

Every day after school the boys practiced on the field which they had selected for their ball ground. Very often other boys would come to watch them, and various were the comments made.

"They are all right, and they'll give the Brookside Club and the Camdale Club a warm tussle," said one.

"Oh, they can't play at all," said another. "Just you wait and see the club Si Voup is getting up."

"Is he getting up a club?"

"Sure he is—he and Sidney Yates. They are going to sweep everything, too, when the proper time comes."

What the boy said about Si Voup getting up a club was true. Angered to think that he had not been asked to joint the Lakeports, Voup organized

his club without delay, he being the pitcher and Sidney Yates the catcher. As the crowd had plenty of money they soon procured uniforms and bats, balls, masks, protectors, gloves and other things which go to equip a first-class team.

"We'll show 'em who are the champions of Lakeport," said Si Voup. "We'll beat them out of their hides!"

Joe's club soon heard about the rivals and about the elegant outfit which had been purchased. In the meantime the boys went around among their folks and managed to raise forty-five dollars.

"That's a pretty fair sum," said Fred. "But we ought to have a little more. Outfits worth using will cost at least six dollars per player, and we'll want ten or fifteen dollars for extras."

No boy living in the vicinity of the lake was more enthusiastic over the club than Teddy Dugan. By common consent Teddy was made a member without paying any initiation fee, and Harry called him the club's mascot. During a game Teddy was to look after the bats and other arti-

cles, and he likewise promised to do all he could to get the grounds in readiness for the first match.

"Which puts me in mind that we mustn't forget the grand stand," said Frank. "No grounds is complete without a stand."

"My father says he will build the stand if we'll furnish the lumber," returned Link.

"The lumber will cost a nice penny," came from Bart. "I wish I could find a pocketbook with about a hundred dollars in it. That would just set us on our feet."

"Day dreams!" cried Joe. "Bart, you are in Lakeport, not in a story book."

"Well, why can't I find a pocketbook? You found those papers up to Pine Island last winter, and they were mighty valuable."

"That's true, too."

"Speaking of Pine Island, what's the matter with taking a trip up there next Saturday?" came from Paul Shale. "My uncle said he would lend us his big sloop if we wanted it. We could take our lunch and have a dandy time."

"Fine!" came in a shout from half a dozen.

"What about practicing?" asked Joe.

At this the faces of the others fell, and for a moment there was a dead silence.

"Let us practice in the morning and go directly after dinner," suggested Harry, and this was agreed upon without further question. Some of the boys had to get up very early—in order to do their regular chores—but nobody complained.

So far the practicing had been more for positions than anything else. Nearly every lad had tried his ability at pitching, catching and as shortstop and first baseman. But it was soon realized that only two or three could pitch well and that not more than that number were good in the other positions. On the other hand, several were excellent field players and could catch "running flies" with considerable credit.

"I'll decide on how the places shall be filled next week," said Joe. "It's going to be a hard matter, but I'll do my best. I hope everybody will be satisfied. Of course we haven't got to keep to our one formation throughout the whole season."

The sloop to take the boys up the lake was a

comfortable craft named the *Sprite*. She was not new, but had recently been painted and she had a new mainsail.

The party was composed of eight boys, including Joe, Harry, Fred and Paul. They sailed away before one o'clock, and soon Lakeport was left in the distance. It was a clear, bright day and the breeze was just strong enough to make things lively.

"I'll tell you what Lakeport ought to have," remarked Fred. "A good boat club. They have one at Brookside."

"That's so!" cried Paul. "Perhaps next year we can organize such a club."

"We could have all sorts of contests," came from Link, who was of the party. "Not only among ourselves, but with the other towns and villages on the lake shore."

"Well, you fellows want to pay attention to baseball this season," put in Joe. "One thing at a time."

All of the boys knew more or less about a boat, and they took turns in handling the *Sprite*. They

passed several other craft, including a small row-boat in which the old hunter, Joel Runnell, and his daughter Cora were seated.

"How are ye, boys?" shouted the old hunter and waved his hand.

"How are you?" several shouted back, and tipped their caps to Cora, who smiled sweetly.

"I hear ye have a baseball club," went on Runnell. "I'll have to stop over some day and see ye play."

"Do!" called out Joe. "You must come, too," he added to Cora.

"Thank you, I'll be sure to come," answered the girl.

"Where are ye bound?" continued Joel Runnell.

"Up to Pine Island."

"They tell me that Dan Marcy has been hangin' out up there."

"Marcy!" cried several of the boys.

"Yes."

"I don't want to meet Marcy," said Harry.

"I'm not afraid of him," put in Joe, quickly.

"He can mind his own business and we'll mind ours."

The two boats were now drifting apart and no more was said. Joel Runnell continued on his way toward Lakeport and the *Sprite* headed once again for the island.

The breeze was growing stronger, and inside of an hour it was blowing twice as hard as when they had started. It made the spray fly over the forward deck and more than one boy was caught.

"Gracious! this is a regular shower bath!" cried Paul. "Here, let me take the tiller. We don't want to ship any more water than we can help."

"I hope we don't get a storm," came from Harry. "They say they are pretty nasty if you catch them out here."

"A storm on any lake is nasty," returned Joe. "I got that from Bob Prestley, who has been on a dozen or more, in different sections of the country."

"It won't be any fun to land if it rains," came from Link.

"It will be just as much fun as to stay on the sloop," answered another of the crowd. "But I don't think it will rain."

At last they came in sight of Pine Island, a narrow strip of land lying half a mile off the western shore of the lake. The island was low at either end, with something of a hill in the middle. Thick pine trees graced the hill, giving the island its name, and other trees lined the shores, with heavy brushwood between.

There was a cove on the eastern side of the island, where landing was easy, and to this cove Paul steered the *Sprite*. As they came closer he ordered the others to take in the jib and lower the mainsail, and the momentum of the craft carried her directly to a good anchorage. Joe threw out a boathook with a rope, and they made fast to a tree.

"Now we can go ashore," said Paul. "Don't forget to take the lunch baskets with you."

"As if we'd forget them!" cried Fred. "A sail on the lake always makes me tremendously hungry."

"This neighborhood looks a good deal different

from what it did last winter," remarked Joe, as he gazed around. "Then everything was covered with ice and snow."

To get a good look at the surroundings the boys decided to climb to the top of the hill. This was not such an easy task, owing to the closeness of the trees and brushwood.

"Phew! don't go so fast!" panted Fred. "I'm all out of wind!"

"And I've torn my sleeve," came from Paul.

They paused for awhile, at the same time listening to the wind as it moaned through the pines.

"I'm going to be the first at the top!" cried Joe, when they started again. "Come on, who will race me?"

Harry and Fred followed, but soon the stout youth fell behind. Then Joe came out at a bit of a clearing and mounted a big flat rock.

"Hurrah! I've won!" he cried, swinging his cap in the air. "What is the prize?"

"A ham sandwich," answered Link, who was carrying one of the lunch baskets. "Here you are," and he handed it out.

"Let us rest a bit before eating anything," said Frank. "A fellow can't eat when he is out of wind."

"Humph! I can eat any time," grumbled Fred. "Try me and see."

"If we had a spyglass we could see for a long distance from here," remarked Link, as he mounted the rock beside Joe. "What a fine view it is!"

"Unless I miss my guess a storm is coming up," announced Joe, with a keen look at the western sky. "It's getting black over there."

"Oh, don't scare us to death," put in Harry. "Maybe it will blow off in some other direction."

"No, it is heading directly this way. Don't you think so, Fred?"

"It certainly is coming toward the island," answered the stout youth.

"I hope the sloop isn't in danger," came from Paul. "I don't want anything to happen to her while she is in my care."

"Wonder if I can see the sloop from here?"

mused Joe. He turned around and gazed down towards the cove. "Oh, Paul!"

"What is it?" came quickly from the other youth.

"The sloop is gone!"

CHAPTER VII.

ADVENTURES ON THE ISLAND.

"Do you mean to tell me the *Sprite* is not at the cove?" demanded Paul, leaping to his feet from the log upon which he had been resting.

"If she is, I can't see her," answered Joe.

"Neither can I see the boat," added Fred.

"Let me take a look."

The others were willing and made room on the rock for their companion. Paul gazed down to the cove and strained his eyes to their utmost.

"Well?" asked several, impatiently.

"Gone, just as sure as guns!" he ejaculated at last. "Where can she be?"

"There's a sailboat away out on the lake," announced Link. "Can that be the *Sprite?*"

All turned in the direction indicated. The craft was headed directly away from them, so it was

hard to determine just what manner of boat she could be.

"She certainly looks like the *Sprite,*" said Paul, slowly. "I'm going down to the cove to see about this," he continued, leaping off the rock.

"We'll all go," put in Harry. "If the boat is gone how are we to get back home?"

All of the lads looked at each other in consternation. Not one had thought of this before.

"Well, staying here over night will be no novelty to me," said Fred.

"But our folks will be worried over us," came from Link.

"Yes, I promised to be back by nine o'clock sure," added another of the party.

"What can't be cured must be endured," said another.

"I'm sure I tied that boat good and tight," said Joe. "I was very particular about it, Paul."

"I know you were, Joe, for I looked at the rope myself, before coming away," answered Paul Shale. "If the boat is gone——" He did not finish.

"If she couldn't drift away somebody must have taken her," said Bart.

"Don't you remember what Joel Runnell said?" shouted Harry. "I mean about Dan Marcy hanging out up here?"

"I was thinking of him," said Paul. "Do you really think he would dare to take the sloop?"

"That chap would dare to do anything—if he thought he wouldn't be caught," answered Joe. "He is a thoroughly bad egg."

By this time the whole party was well on the way down the hill. As they reached the bottom they noted that the sky to the westward was much overcast.

"We are sure to catch that storm now," remarked Fred, "and when it comes I guess it will be a corker."

"Which proves the old saying that it never pours but what we have a flood," grumbled Frank. "Losing the sloop is bad enough, without any more troubles."

At last they reached the cove and all gazed

blankly at the spot where the *Sprite* had ridden at anchor such a short while before.

"Gone, that's all there is to it," said Joe, who was the first to speak.

"Here are some footprints along the shore," said Link, who was examining the ground. "See, they come from back of yonder bushes."

"Only one pair of feet," said Harry. "That would seem to prove that only one person sailed away with the sloop."

"You must be right, Harry," said Paul. "And that person must have been Dan Marcy."

"We can't prove that—just yet," said another of the crowd.

They looked around, but could find nothing which might give them a clew to the one who had taken the boat. Then they looked at each other.

"Is there another boat around here?" asked Bart. "Even a rowboat will do—anything to get to the mainland in."

"I don't know of any boat," answered Joe.

Neither did any of the other boys, and it was decided to skirt the shore of the island for some

distance on the lookout for a craft of any kind. But the search proved unsuccessful, and at last Joe called a halt.

"It's beginning to rain!" cried Fred. "We've got to get to some sort of a shelter, or we'll get soaked."

"Let us see if our shelter from last winter is still standing," said Harry. "I don't mean Snow Lodge, but the shelter by the cliff."

"Two Tree Lodge," said Fred. "I don't see why it shouldn't be standing, and it will make a good shelter from this storm."

Joe, Harry and Fred knew the way well and the others followed in their footsteps. They had to climb over some rough rocks and then jump a small brook. Just as they came in sight of the shelter the rain began to come down heavily.

"Hurrah! the shelter is O. K." came from Fred. "Come on in, fellows, out of the wet."

The shelter, as my old readers know, was composed of two heavy trees which leaned up against a cliff twenty to twenty-five feet in height. The under limbs of the trees had been chopped off and

piled on top, and large quantities of brushwood had been added. During the winter snow had been heaped over the brushwood, but now this was of course gone.

"Hullo, somebody has had a camp-fire in here!" cried Joe, as he entered. "See, the ashes are still hot!"

"Yes, and here are several cans and cups," added Fred. "Somebody has surely been living here. Wonder if it was Dan Marcy?"

"More than likely, although other folks come here, too," added another of the crowd. "This is certainly cozy enough!" he continued, gazing around admiringly. "And the name, Two Tree Lodge, just fits it."

"Just listen to the rain!" exclaimed Joe. "We didn't get here any too quick."

It was a hard shower, and at the end of half an hour it was raining as steadily as ever. With the coming of the shower the wind at first died down, but now it came up stronger than before, whistling furiously through the pines and bringing many a decayed branch down with a loud crash.

"If we were out in this we'd be wet to the skin," remarked Frank. "Even as it is, some water is coming in here."

"Let us start up the fire," suggested Link. "It will make it more cheerful."

"Do you imagine there are any wild animals around here?" questioned Frank.

"More than likely—I don't think we killed all of them last winter," answered Harry with a grin. "Wouldn't you like to meet a wildcat, or a big bear?"

"Not much!"

"What a pity somebody didn't bring a gun along," came from Fred. "We may need it for protection, or for bringing down some food."

"I've got a fishing line and some hooks in my pocket," said Frank.

"Good! Then we can catch some fish if we can't do anything else."

It was not until sundown that the rain ceased. The wind blew as hard as ever and soon the sky became perfectly clear.

"Our folks will certainly be worried over us,

especially because of the storm," said Link. "But I suppose it can't be helped. If it was daylight we might build a raft and try to reach the mainshore that way."

All were anxious to catch a few fish, and soon they were back to the shore. Some bait was found and Frank also had two very good artificial flies along. Four of the lads went fishing at once, in as many different places.

"Hurrah! here's the first catch!" cried Link, and brought up a perch weighing seven or eight ounces. "Not very big, but better than nothing."

Frank was after a lake trout and was making his casts near the foot of a big tree which overhung the lake. Presently there was a flash and a tug and he knew he had his game. Then began a bit of real fishing, which came to an end as he brought his prize up on the bank and clutched it in both hands.

"Good for you, Frank!" sang out Joe. "That is certainly worth while. A pound and a half if he is an ounce!"

After that the fishing continued steadily, until

they had three trout, two bass and nine perch to their credit.

"There's a good supper for all hands," declared Link. "Now the question is, who is going to do the cooking?"

"Harry is the boy to cook fish," declared Fred.

"Yes, when I have something to work with," was Harry's answer. "However, I'll do the best I can with the utensils we found at the shelter."

It was dark by the time they returned to Two Tree Lodge. The fire was stirred up and several set to work to bring in firewood for the night, breaking it up with their feet and knees or cutting it with their jack-knives.

"This shows how useful a hatchet is," said Link. "When you've got it you don't appreciate it, but when you haven't got it you want it the worst way."

"And that's the way with lots of things," added Frank. "'Do without, if you want to know the real worth of a thing,' is what my father often says."

It was not long before the fire was blazing in

good shape, and while the others cleaned the fish Harry set to work to cook them to a turn.

"This is the way to eat fish!" declared Joe, smacking his lips over a particularly sweet morsel. "The fish one buys in a market is nothing like this."

"I know some men who won't eat fish unless they are just caught," came from Link. "They say the right way to eat trout is to take 'em from the hook and drop 'em in the pan."

"Well, I want mine cleaned first," said Frank, dryly.

The boys took their time about eating, and along with sandwiches and some cake they had brought with them, the fish made them a substantial supper.

"One of us ought to stay on guard to-night," said Joe. "It won't be safe for all to go to sleep. There is no telling what animal may be prowling around in the darkness."

"Let us take turns at watching," answered Fred. "Each fellow can stay on guard just an hour. That will give us eight hours for sleep."

"With one cut off for guard duty," corrected Bart. "All right, that suits me."

It also suited the others, and soon all turned in but Frank, who was the first selected to remain on guard.

CHAPTER VIII.

PRACTICING ONCE MORE.

SUNDAY morning found the entire party up bright and early. Nothing had come to disturb them during the night, for which all were thankful. A few of the fish had not been eaten the evening before, and these were prepared for breakfast.

"We must go down to the shore and watch for a boat," said Paul, while they were finishing their repast. "Don't forget that I must let my uncle know how the sloop was stolen."

"To be sure, and the quicker we get on the track of the thief the better," returned Joe.

Not long after this they walked down to the cove and from that point journeyed along the shore for the best part of a mile.

"Hi! I see a boat!" cried Link. "A sailboat, and she is headed this way!"

"Can it be the *Sprite?*" questioned Fred.

"No, the craft is a yacht. I guess it is Mr. Felding's *Gem.*"

"Perhaps he is looking for us," said Paul. "My uncle may have asked him to come up."

They watched the course of the little yacht with interest, and as it came closer set up a loud shout and waved their handkerchiefs. At last they were discovered and somebody on the yacht waved a handkerchief in return.

"We are seen!" cried Fred. "I am thankful for it."

Soon the yacht came up to the shore, and then they saw that it had on board Mr. Felding, the owner; Mr. Shale, Paul's uncle, and Mr. Westmore and Mr. Rush.

"Are you all safe, boys?" was the first question put to them.

"All safe!" they shouted back.

"Thank heaven for that!" murmured Mr. Westmore, and a great load was lifted from his heart.

"I suppose you didn't want to come back in that storm," said Paul's uncle.

"It wasn't that, Uncle Dick," answered the youth. "Somebody has stolen the sloop."

"Stolen the sloop!" ejaculated all of the gentlemen on the yacht.

"Yes. We tied her up and went to the hill, and somebody took her as soon as we had our backs turned."

Paul told his story and the others corroborated him. The gentlemen were very much interested.

"And you think it was Dan Marcy did this?" questioned Mr. Shale.

"Yes—but we are not certain," answered Joe.

"It would be just like Marcy," put in Mr. Westmore. "Remember what he has done in the past."

"Which way did he go?" asked Mr. Felding.

The boys pointed out the direction, and all decided to follow in the course of the *Sprite*.

"We can't spend too much time in the search," observed Mr. Westmore. "Remember, the folks at home are very anxious concerning all of the boys."

The *Gem* was a trim little craft, built for speed, as well as good looks, and with all sails set cut the

water in a fashion to tickle any nautical heart. More than this, Mr. Felding was a crack yachtsman and knew exactly how to get the best speed out of his craft.

"She certainly is a gem!" was Harry's remark. "What a cruise a fellow could take in such a boat as this."

"Yes, especially if the lake was larger," answered Frank.

A run of an hour brought them pretty well down the eastern shore of the lake. They passed several small sailing vessels, and also some rowboats, but caught sight of nothing that looked like the *Sprite.* They also questioned some of the people they met but could gain no information concerning the missing sloop.

"They have got into some out-of-the-way place with her," said Mr. Shale. "It's an easy thing to do—with so many coves and creeks handy, and so much woodland and bushes."

At last the search was given up for the time being and the yacht was headed for Lakeport. As soon as they came in sight of the town they saw

a crowd collecting at the main wharf to meet them.

"Are they all safe?" was the first question, and when it was answered in the affirmative a cheer went up.

"We thought you might be drowned," said Mrs. Westmore, as she greeted her sons.

"I have passed a sleepless night," came from Mrs. Rush. "Fred, you must not stay away again like that."

"It couldn't be helped, mother," was the answer.

The news soon circulated that the *Sprite* had been stolen, and Mr. Shale offered a reward of ten dollars to anybody who would locate the craft.

"I won't offer any more than that just now," said he to Mr. Westmore. "As they can't take the boat off the lake we are bound to find her sooner or later."

Ten dollars was quite a sum to some men and boys living in the vicinity of Pine Lake, and many went out Sunday afternoon and all day Monday, looking for the *Sprite*. But, strange as it may ap-

pear, not a trace of the sloop was discovered. Then Mr. Shale increased his reward to fifty dollars.

"Maybe they sunk her," suggested Joe. "They could do that, and then raise her after the search is over, and give her a different coat of paint and a new name."

"Well, I guess anybody who would steal her would be mean enough to do almost anything with her," answered Harry.

The members of the baseball club were very anxious to get the best uniforms possible for their money, and so the secretary of the club was ordered to send to half a dozen firms for samples and prices. The latter were speedily forthcoming, and one firm, more energetic than the rest, sent along four sample suits, so that they might be inspected.

"That firm certainly has faith in its goods," said Joe. "If they didn't they wouldn't send us four complete suits."

"And their prices are a little lower than the other firms," added Fred. "I guess we'll have to get our outfit from them." And the majority of the boys thought the same.

Some were anxious to don the new uniforms and they were loaned out to Harry, Paul, Link and Matt. All were cautioned to keep the suits clean and in good order and promised to do so.

"Now I feel like a real baseball player," declared Harry, after he had the suit on.

"It certainly fits you to perfection," was his brother's comment. "It couldn't be better if it had been made to order."

"I wish we all had suits, Joe. Si Voup's club has them."

"Well, we'll have them before long. By the way, I suppose we'll get a challenge from the Voup crowd sooner or later."

As soon as the excitement occasioned by the disappearance of the *Sprite* died down the boys turned to their baseball practice once more. As before, they went at it each day after school and soon there was a marked improvement in every player. Each was almost settled in the position he was to occupy, although several changes were still to take place.

Ever since the hat episode Mr. Montgomery Jadell had been extra severe with the boys, often keeping them in after school when he knew they wanted to practice. The boys, however, said nothing, for the term was drawing to a close and they knew that in two weeks more their troubles in that direction would be over.

"I wish we could give him a rousing send-off," said Harry. "He deserves it." He had heard that in the fall they were to have a new school principal.

"Just wait till the term ends," put in Fred, who was present. "I guess we can do something to make him remember Lakeport."

The next afternoon was a particularly fine one, and when they went out to practice Harry, Paul, Link and Matt wore the suits. Some cheered but others poked fun at them.

"Cutting a dash, ain't you?" said one. "Oh, my, ain't we ball players, though!"

"You're only sorry that you haven't a suit," retorted Link.

"I suppose we've got to get used to it," said

Paul. "All the same, I wish the whole club had uniforms."

The play that afternoon was of the bright, snappy kind. There was some good pitching and field work, and half a dozen creditable hits were made.

"You are doing finely," said a gentleman named Monroe Corsen, who was a graduate of one of our large colleges. "Keep it up and you will certainly win some games this summer."

"We are going to do our best," answered Joe.

Harry had been told to go to the store before returning home for supper and so, with one or two others, left the ball field before the rest. He carried with him one of the bats which none of the players cared particularly to use, as it was unusually heavy.

"We'll have to trade this for a lighter bat," he said, to one of his companions.

"Yes, if we get the chance. Hardly anybody wants to use such a heavy bat. It was a mistake to get it in the first place," was the answer.

Harry hurried down one street and then around

the corner into another, which was lined with a number of small shops. Just as he turned the corner he noticed a commotion a block away and heard a sudden cry.

"Look out for the bull! Jerry Flagg's bull has broken loose!"

"Hullo, a wild bull!" he cried. "He'll make trouble in this street, if he once gets agoing!"

He looked along the street, but could not at first locate the beast. But then came a roaring bellow, and the bull emerged from an alleyway not a hundred feet away. He had a long rope tied around his neck.

"Oh, help! Please take the bull away!" shrieked a voice not far from where Harry was standing, and looking around he espied a little girl of six crouched close to a shop window.

The little girl was dressed in a bright suit of red and this at once attracted the bull's attention. With a snort he leaped into the street and then charged straight for the little girl, with lowered horns and with eyes glaring wickedly, as if to gore her to death on the spot.

CHAPTER IX.

A BOY AND A BULL.

To Harry it looked as if the little girl might be killed at any instant, and for the moment his heart seemed to stop beating. He recognized the child as the daughter of Mr. Corsen, the gentleman he had just left at the ball field. She was a dear little creature and a great pet of all who knew her.

"Run! run!" he called out. "Run, Violet!"

But little Violet was too scared to move and only remained crouching by the shop window, her eyes filled with terror.

It was then that Harry's natural bravery asserted itself. Baseball bat in hand he leaped swiftly to the little girl's assistance.

"Oh, help me!" she screamed. "Take the naughty bull away!"

To this Harry did not answer. Hauling off he

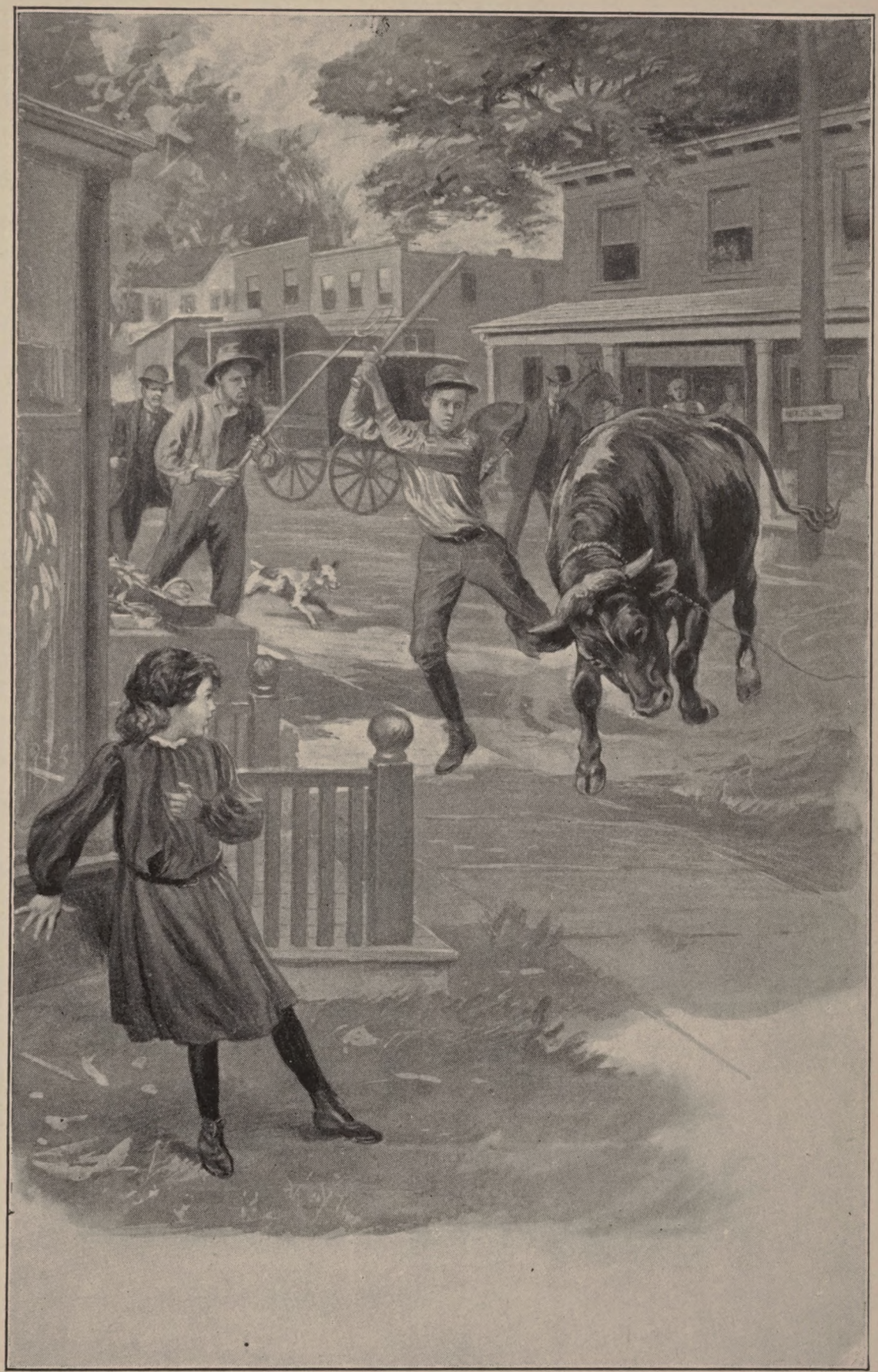
took quick aim, and down came the bat on the bull's head with telling effect. Then, as the beast staggered and paused, he hit the savage creature another blow.

"That's it! Give it to him!" cried a man some yards away. But he himself kept at a safe distance.

The second blow from the baseball bat drove the bull back into the roadway and there he stood, swaying from side to side and glaring ferociously at Harry. By this time the beast's owner, Jerry Flagg, a farmer, was rushing up, pitchfork in hand. Others were also gathering.

"Go into the shop, Violet!" called out Harry. "Don't wait—go at once."

The little girl hesitated a few seconds longer, but then ran for the shop door. As she did this, the bull charged upon Harry. The boy saw it would be useless to attempt to stay that rush and so leaped to one side. On came the beast and struck the shop just beside the show window with such force that one of the panes of glass was broken.



Down came the bat on the bull's head.

"Hi! hi! drat ye!" came from Jerry Flagg, and now he managed to get hold of the end of the rope which was dragging behind the bull. "Git back here, ye villain!"

"Look out, Jerry, or he'll gore you!" called somebody in the crowd that was gathering.

"No, he won't gore me!" answered Jerry Flagg. "I know him. He's got ter mind, or I'll kill him!" And rushing closer he gave the bull a vicious jab with the pitchfork. The beast whirled around and then started down the street at full speed, scattering the crowd in all directions. After the bull came Jerry Flagg, trying to catch hold of the rope once more. Thus beast and man left the town behind, and the excitement in that quarter came to an end. It may be stated here that the farmer caught the bull two hours later and had him tied up in such a fashion that for the time being he could do no further damage.

"Harry, that was a fine thing to do," said one of the men who had witnessed the boy's actions. "You did give him two hard ones with your bat."

"Well, I didn't want to see little Violet Corsen hurt," he answered. "If the bull had gotten at her he might have killed her. He had his eyes on her bright red dress."

"Yes, I saw that myself. But you can be thankful the bull didn't knock you over."

"I am thankful. How thick a bull's head must be! Two such whacks as that would kill any ordinary beast."

"Oh, they are tough, and that old beast of Flagg's is especially so. I reckon he'll keep the bull out of town after this."

Harry went into the shop and found Violet still full of excitement and fear.

"It's all over now," he said kindly. "You can go now if you want to."

"Oh, Harry, I'm afraid to go alone!"

"Then I'll take you home."

This pleased the little girl, and hand in hand they left the shop and started for the Corsen residence, which was on the most fashionable side street of Lakeport. It was soon reached and Harry left Violet at the gate. Then he hurried

back, to do his errand and get home in time for supper.

"You are a little late," said his mother, when he entered.

"I couldn't help it, mother. There was some excitement downtown. Jerry Flagg brought a bull into town and he broke loose, and smashed one of Mr. Jackson's shop windows."

"Did he come after you?"

"Not exactly, but I hit him with my baseball bat. Then he ran away."

"You must be careful, Harry. A bull is a dangerous animal when he gets wild."

No more was said about the happening by Harry and the supper passed as usual. But hardly was it finished when the doorbell rang.

"Who can that be?" murmured Mrs. Westmore and sent Laura to answer the summons. On the piazza stood Mr. Monroe Corsen and his wife, with Violet.

"Is Harry at home?" asked the gentleman.

"Yes, sir. Please walk in," answered Laura.

"Oh, Mrs. Westmore, I want to thank Harry for

what he did!" cried Mrs. Corsen, hysterically. "He was so brave! If it hadn't been for him our Violet would have been gored to death!"

"Harry, it was a fine thing to do," said the gentleman, heartily. "I've been downtown and several told me of how you jumped in between Violet and the bull and struck the bull with your bat. I owe you a good deal for that, my lad." And he gave the boy a warm squeeze of the hand.

"It was grand!" cried Mrs. Corsen. "Harry, you are a hero!" And she gave him a hug.

"He didn't tell me of all this," said Mrs. Westmore. "Harry, why didn't you?"

"Oh, I don't know," he answered, blushing. "I —I only did what I thought I had to do."

"He was too modest, that's why!" cried Mrs. Corsen. And then she and her husband gave the details of the affair as they had gathered them.

"Good for Harry!" ejaculated Joe. "I'm glad you had that heavy baseball bat with you."

"It was the red dress that brought on the trouble," put in Mr. Westmore, secretly pleased at the bravery his son had shown. "Bulls hate red as a

person hates poison. I heard about his breaking loose, but I didn't hear any more than that."

"Harry, I feel that I owe you something substantial for what you have done," said Mr. Corsen. "Violet is very dear to my wife and me."

"No, you don't owe me a thing!" was Harry's quick answer, and he blushed again.

"But I think I do," persisted the gentleman. "I want to reward you."

"I don't want any reward."

Mr. Corsen looked nonplussed for a moment.

"Harry will be satisfied with your thanks, Mr. Corsen," came from Mr. Westmore. "I know how he feels. I should feel the same, and so should you."

"Well, perhaps." Monroe Corsen hesitated. "Let me see, I believe you are trying your best to make a success of your baseball club?" he went on, and looked at both Harry and Joe.

"Yes, sir," answered Joe.

"Then perhaps you'll allow me to do something for the club?"

"Oh, you can do what you please for the club,

Mr. Corsen," cried Harry. "That represents Lakeport, you know—that is, it will represent Lakeport unless Si Voup's club plays better ball."

"Then I'll see what I can do for the club," answered Mr. Corsen; and a little later he and his wife left the Westmore home.

"Wonder what he will do?" said Joe, when he and his brother were retiring for the night.

"Oh, he'll give us something," answered Harry. "Perhaps some extra bats and balls, or something for the clubroom."

"He is a pretty rich man, Harry."

"I know it, but what I did wasn't of such tremendous importance. Any of the fellows could have done it."

On the following day, after school, Harry found a letter awaiting him. It was from Mr. Corsen, and ran as follows:

"To Harry Westmore and the Lakeport Baseball Club:

"As a token of my appreciation of what was done for my little daughter Violet, and also as an

evidence of the interest I take in the recently organized Lakeport Baseball Club, I hereby donate to the club the sum of one hundred dollars, to be known as the Violet Corsen Fund, and to be used as the officers and members of the Lakeport Baseball Club deem best. With best wishes for your success, I remain, "MONROE T. CORSEN."

"Hurrah! isn't that fine?" cried Harry, as he read the letter to his brother. "And here is the cash—ten ten-dollar bills." And he held the money up in his hand.

"This is certainly generous," returned Joe. "A hundred dollars, with what we already have, will buy us everything we need and leave a little in the treasury besides."

"I think you ought to call a special meeting of the club on this."

"I will," answered Joe, and ran off to execute the idea without delay. Soon the boys gathered at the clubroom, and then Harry read the letter out loud and passed the hundred dollars over to the treasurer.

"Whoop! this is simply great!" cried Fred. "Harry, you're a—a peach!"

"Wish we could all hammer bulls with bats!" piped in Matt. "Say, wouldn't we get rich, at one hundred per bull?" And this raised a short laugh.

"Let us give Mr. Corsen a vote of thanks," suggested Link. "It's the very least we can do."

"A vote of thanks and a complimentary seat in the grand stand to all of our games," added Bart.

The latter suggestion met with instant approval, and a nicely worded letter was sent to the gentleman without delay and in it was enclosed the necessary pass for the grandstand.

"I am sure that ought to please him," said Joe, after reading the letter over, and adding his signature to the pass. And it did please the gentleman very much, as they afterwards found out.

CHAPTER X.

THE FIRST CHALLENGE.

It must not be supposed from what has been written in these pages that the Lakeport Baseball Club as now organized was the first club that locality had ever had. In the past the boys, big and little, had had various clubs, and had played numerous matches with lads of their own age. But all of those had been nothing but boys' games and the organizations had been largely so in name only.

Now, however, matters were different. The new club had a duly elected set of officers, a regular clubroom, and, what was equally important, a treasury with some dollars in it. More than this, the club was to be uniformed and was to play match games under the rules of the regular amateur baseball associations.

"No more such hit-or-miss playing as we used to have," said Joe. "Every fellow has got to toe

the mark every time, or I'll put him off the field and put somebody else in his place."

It had at last been decided what positions the various members of the club should play, and Joe was now drilling them in to team work and in a knowledge of signals. The line-up at the first game was to be as follows; the figures representing the batting order:

LAKEPORT BASEBALL CLUB.

7—Joe Westmore, captain, and pitcher.
3—Fred Rush, catcher.
6—Harry Westmore, first baseman.
8—Link Darrow, second baseman.
2—Bart Mason, third baseman.
4—Matt Roscoe, shortstop.
9—Paul Shale, centerfield.
1—Walter Bannister, leftfield.
5—Frank Pemberton, rightfield.

SUBSTITUTES:

10—Augustus De Vere.
11—Teddy Dugan.
12—Ike Suttervane.

"I want you all to remember that this list is open to change," said Joe. "If I can't pitch to suit I'm going to put somebody in my place, and what holds good of me must hold good of everybody else. Perhaps before the season is over we'll all be changed around."

"I'm sure I'm satisfied," said Walter. "I didn't expect anything but a field position."

"So am I satisfied," put in Frank.

"I'm going after all the flies," said Paul. "I'll run my best to get 'em."

The only lad who was not satisfied was Augustus De Vere, who was a good deal of a dude and played very indifferent ball.

"Now this isn't fair, don't you know," he drawled. "Why didn't you put me in as first baseman, or something like that?"

"I did what I thought was best," said Joe, briefly. "You'll have first show, if any of us drop out or fail to appear on the field on time."

"It's beastly, don't you know," grumbled De Vere.

"Sure, an' it's yourself is ahead av me on the

list,'' piped in Teddy Dugan, cheerfully. The Irish lad was modest and had expected nothing better.

''Ye-as, an' ahead o' me, my crickey!'' came from Ike Suttervane, who was a genuine country boy and who had been made a member because of the fun of it. ''Here I be down to the very bottom o' the list. Reckon it's goin' to be a hull month o' Sundays before I git to the top. But I don't care—I can't pitch no more'n a keow. But I kin hit th' ball all right,'' he added, brightening.

The positions definitely settled, team work went on nearly every day with great regularity. In the meantime the uniforms and other needed things were sent for, and one afternoon a big box arrived by express and was taken to the clubroom.

''Now we are the real thing!'' cried Link, as the articles were taken from the box and passed around for inspection. ''Here's the catcher's mask and another for the umpire, if he wants it, and here's the catcher's protector, and here are the gloves.''

"And here are the shoes and stockings," put in another member.

"And the score-book," came from a third. "And the letters for our shirts."

"And one dozen regular league balls and six first-class bats with a canvas cover," put in another. "Now we are ready to play ball and no mistake."

"Well, it's time we were ready," came from Bart. "Here is a challenge that just reached me," and the secretary drew it from his pocket.

"The first!" cried Harry. "Who is it from?"

"I'll read it," said Bart, and proceeded to do so.

"To the Lakeport Baseball Club:

"We, the members of the Excelsior Baseball Club, of Lakeport, do hereby challenge you to a game of ball, to be played on our grounds or on your own, as you may choose, on Saturday, June 10, at 3 P. M. It is understood that the admission to the grand stand shall be placed at 10 cents to everybody and that the winning team shall take

three-quarters of the receipts and be declared the champions of Lakeport.

"Silas Voup, Captain E. B. C.

"Sidney Yates, Secretary E. B. C."

"P. S.—Kindly send reply inside of three days."

"They mean business," said Joe. "June tenth? That is just nine days off."

"Grand stand, 10 cents to everybody," mused Bart. "That's pretty cheap. Now I should charge ten and a quarter."

"We'll have to give the public their money's worth on the first game," answered Matt. "In one way, the opening game ought to be free."

"I'd rather play on our grounds," came from Walter.

"So would I," put in Harry. "But their stand is larger."

"What if they beat us?"

At this question there issued a series of groans, followed by cheers.

"They can't beat us!"

"We mustn't let them do it!"

"We are bound to be the champions!"

"I think we ought to play them a series of three games," suggested Joe. "One game is hardly a fair test."

"That is exactly my idea," said Fred. "Let us talk it over with Voup and his crowd."

"Of course if he wants to play only one game let it be so," said Link. "I'm sure we can beat them."

A note was addressed to the members of the Excelsiors, asking for a conference, and the talk came off the next afternoon. The rivals had already considered the matter of playing three games for the local championship, and were willing to come to such an agreement. It was decided that the first game should be played on the Excelsiors' grounds, the second on the Lakeports' grounds and the third, if a third game was necessary, should be decided by a toss-up.

"We are going to wax you good and hard from the start," said Si Voup, after the meeting was

over. "After the first inning you won't be in it a little bit."

"Talk is cheap," answered Fred, dryly. "It costs money to buy mules. Wait till the first game is over."

"I don't see how you can expect to win," put in Sidney Yates. "We have got the finest players in this vicinity on our club."

"No professionals are to be allowed," said Joe, quickly.

"Oh, we haven't any professionals," answered Si Voup. But this was not strictly a fact, since two of the players on his team had played for money several times.

It was soon noised about the town that a series of three games had been arranged between the rival clubs, and there was much discussion as to which club would win. Some grew enthusiastic one way and some another, and not a few wagers were laid.

"If we lose we'll never hear the end of it," said Harry to Joe one day, when on the way to school. "How Si Voup and his cronies will crow!"

"Don't think of losing, Harry. We've simply got to win, that is all there is to it."

As already mentioned, the school term at Lakeport was drawing to a close. Many of the boys had to work on the farms of that locality, and school was to shut up on the Friday previous to the day fixed for the first ball game of the series.

"We mustn't forget to give Old Stovepipe a good send-off," said Harry.

"Don't you worry about that," said Fred. "Matt Roscoe and I have one little plan fixed."

"And I've got a plan, too," came from Link. "Bart is going to help me carry it out."

"Here is something to set the ball a-rolling with," came from Frank, and he disclosed a big cigar box which he had been carrying under his coat.

"What have you there?" questioned Joe.

"Don't ask questions, but watch out. This is going into Old Stovepipe's desk."

"Matt and I have something for his hat," said Fred.

"And we have something for his coat pockets,"

put in Link. "We'll give him something to remember the boys of Lakeport by."

"Well, he deserves something," said Harry. "He has always been crabbed and cross from the first day he came here. I'll be mighty glad to have a new principal next term."

"Where is he going to from here?" asked another boy.

"He says he is going down-east."

"Well, I hope he stays there," came from Link. "Anyway, we don't want him here again."

"I pity the new school he goes to," said Bart.

It was the last day of school and the boys were talking matters over in a corner of the schoolyard. The final session was to last only until noon, and soon the bell rang calling them in.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAST DAY AT SCHOOL.

"THE school will come to order," said Mr. Montgomery Jadell, as soon as the pupils were seated. "I wish it understood that, though this is the last day of the session, order must be strictly observed."

"He is laying down the law," whispered Link to Harry.

"Darrow, stop your talking," said the principal, severely.

"Yes, sir."

"I have had enough trouble during this term—I want no more on this last day," went on Montgomery Jadell. "Pemberton, you may wipe off the blackboards while the others join in singing, 'Good-bye, Old School, Good-bye.' "

Frank lost no time in going to the platform, and,

watching his chance, he placed the big cigar box in the teacher's desk.

In the meantime some of the other boys got excused and went into the entryway, where the principal kept his hat and coat. During the school hours Mr. Jadell always wore a long linen duster.

The pupils sang several songs and then there was an exercise in spelling.

"Thanks to my teaching you are doing fairly well," said the principal. "But you ought to do better. We will now have the declamations already arranged for."

Some visitors were coming in and these were given the use of several chairs and benches. Then Montgomery Jadell went to his desk to get out a book containing the declamations mentioned.

"Hullo, how did that cigar box get here?" he murmured to himself, and taking the box he opened it. "Oh! oh! get off of me! Oh!"

He started back and dropped the box, for out of it leaped seven frisky little mice which Frank had caught in his father's barn. One mouse scampered across the desk, another ran up the

school teacher's arm, and the rest scattered in all directions on the floor.

"A mouse!" shrieked one of the girls.

"A whole lot of mice!" was the cry.

"See them run! Look out, or they'll get in your clothes!"

There was an immediate uproar, and a number of persons leaped on the chairs, benches and desks. In the meantime Montgomery Jadell caught the mouse on his arm and flung it away. It landed in the face of Mr. Ebenezer Boles, one of the school committeemen.

"Hi! hi! don't throw your mice at me!" roared the committeeman, wrathfully.

"Excuse me—I didn't——" began Mr. Jadell, but the rest of his answer was swallowed up in the general uproar.

"Catch the mice!" called out Joe. "Don't let them get into the girls' hair!"

"Oh!" screamed one of the girls. "I don't want any mouse in my hair." And several ran from the schoolroom at top speed.

Some of those present were kicking at the mice

and trying to hit them with rulers and sticks. One boy aimed an ink-well at two in a corner, but his aim was wild and the ink merely splashed over one of the visitors' faces.

"Joe Smith, I'll—I'll wring your neck for that!"

"I—I didn't mean to do it, Mrs. Radley, indeed I didn't!" howled the boy, as he felt himself caught up by the ear.

"Order! order!" cried Montgomery Jadell. "Order! I will have order!"

"Better come to order yourself!" growled Ebenezer Boles. "Flinging around mice ain't very orderly!"

It was a good ten minutes before the mice were disposed of and the school could be quieted down. Montgomery Jadell was boiling with wrath.

"I want to know who placed those mice in my desk?" he said, gazing fixedly at the boys.

Of course there was a dead silence.

"Better ask the mice themselves," murmured Ebenezer Boles. "The boys ain't goin' to tell."

And now that the excitement was over he smiled to himself over the joke.

"Mr. Boles, do you uphold this sort of thing?" demanded the school principal.

"What sort o' thing?"

"This placing mice in my desk."

"Course I don't, Mr. Jadell—but boys will be boys. Didn't you have your little jokes when you was young?"

"I never played a joke in my life, sir!"

"Gosh! what a lot o' fun you must have missed!" murmured the old committeeman.

"You are laughing at me!"

"Oh, no!" But the committeeman's face was on a broad grin.

"This is my last day at this school."

"Well, nobuddy ain't said it wasn't."

"I expected to close the school at noon. Perhaps it will be best to bring the session to a close at once."

"Ain't you going to let the youngsters speak their pieces?"

"I don't want to speak!" called out one boy,

who was to recite a hated extract from Julius Cæsar.

"Neither do I want to recite," came from a girl who had been ordered to speak that time-worn effusion, "The Wonderful One-Horse Shay."

"Perhaps you will be glad to get rid of me!" called out Montgomery Jadell, losing his temper completely.

"Oh, dear, how did you guess it?" came from one boy who was hiding behind some others, and this brought out a hearty laugh.

"I—I shall close the school here and now!" ejaculated Montgomery Jadell. "The school is dismissed!"

"Is school out?" came from a dozen or more.

"Yes, and you can all go home. I wouldn't teach here again for a hundred dollars a day!" growled Montgomery Jadell.

"And I shouldn't want you to teach me, Mr. Jadell," came from Harry, in as loud a voice as he could command. "I trust we get a kinder and a smarter man next season."

"You have brought these hard feelings on yourself," put in Joe.

"Ha! I want no back talk——"

"But we are going to tell you what we think of you before you go," came from Fred. "We think you are dictatorial and unfair, and that you do not know half as much as you pretend——"

"He's the sourest teacher I ever saw!" came from one of the girls.

"And we are all glad he is going!" came from several others.

Montgomery Jadell started to talk again, but the babble was so great he could not make himself heard.

"They are all against you," said Ebenezer Boles. "Better take your leave and have done with 'em. I reckon they are more'n half right in what they say. Call at my office to-morrow and get the pay that is still due you."

"Of course you side with them. Well, I will call, for the money is justly mine—and then I shall wash my hands of Lakeport forever!" said Montgomery Jadell, tragically.

Stepping to the entryway he tore off his linen duster and hauled on his long, black coat. Then he reached for his silk hat—the one Harry had had to purchase for him.

As the hat was turned down over the principal's head a stream of chimney soot descended over his face and neck, giving him the appearance of a darky.

"Wha—what is th—this?" he spluttered. "Soot! Who put that in my hat?"

"Oh, my, look at the coon!" cried Matt. "Mr. Jadell, are you in training for a negro minstrels?"

"I'll negro minstrels you!" roared the irate schoolmaster, knocking out the hat and blowing the soot from his nose and eyes. "If I catch the boy who did this—oh, my! Murder! Oh, my fingers!"

He had run his hand into his coat pocket to get his handkerchief. Now he withdrew the hand with a good-sized and very tenacious crab clinging to it. He tried to shake the crab off, but it only stuck the tighter.

"Oh, my hand!" he roared, dancing around.

"My fingers will be bitten off! Somebody take the crab away!"

"Thank you, but I never cared for crabs," said Joe, coolly.

"I only touch crabs on the thirtieth day of February," added Link.

"Who ever saw a coon with such crab-like hands before?" came from Fred.

"He'd be worth the price of admission in a dime museum," called out a boy from the rear.

"I'll dime museum some of you if I ever get clear of this crab!" roared Montgomery Jadell.

"Put your hand in a pail of water," suggested Ebenezer Boles. "He will be sure to let go then."

A pail of water stood in a corner and Montgomery Jadell ran towards it.

"Here, I'll help you!" cried Frank, who intended to do nothing of the sort. He caught up the pail, pretended to stumble, and the water splashed all over the principal's knees and feet.

"Now see what you have done!" spluttered Montgomery Jadell. "I—I—oh, my fingers!"

"Run out to the brook," said one of the ladies present. "The crab will be sure to swim off."

Not far from the schoolhouse was a tiny brook which emptied into Pine Lake. Clutching his silk hat in one hand, the schoolmaster bolted out of the building and half the boys followed him. He swung his hand with the crab on it aloft.

"Here's a race for you!" cried out Harry. "I'll wager the crab gets there first!"

The brook gained, Montgomery Jadell bent down and placed his hand in the water. At first the crab would not let go, and he bent still lower. Then the crab swam away. But just as he did so the foot of the man slipped and over he went into the brook with a loud splash.

"Hurrah! he is taking a bath!" cried one of the boys.

"Going to wash that soot off, I guess."

"Want a life preserver, Mr. Jadell?"

"If you'll come here I'll help you out!"

Drenched and dirty, Montgomery Jadell waded out of the brook. Then he turned and shook his fist at his tormentors.

"You young vipers!" he cried. "You young vipers!" And then, with his dripping silk hat still in hand he ran rather than walked to his home across the fields.

CHAPTER XII.

FOR THE CHAMPIONSHIP.

"I'LL venture to say that Mr. Montgomery Jadell will never forget his last day at Lakeport school," said Joe, to his brother, after the excitement had died down and Ebenezer Boles had sent the pupils home.

"He is mad clean through," returned Harry. "Perhaps we haven't heard the last of this. It was pretty rough horse-play."

"Oh, I don't think he will dare to say much. He knows that he is not liked. The committee are glad to get rid of him."

Joe was right in his surmise. Montgomery Jadell fussed and fumed a little when calling on Ebenezer Boles for the final instalment of his salary and the committeeman told the ex-principal

just what he thought of him. The two parted with some hot words; and two days later Montgomery Jadell left Lakeport never to return.

The affair at school would have received more attention had it not been for the baseball match so close at hand. All of the boys of the town, and a good many men, too, were talking about it, and even some of the girls were interested. Laura made herself a neat three-cornered flag of blue, with the name Lakeport sewed on it in white, and some others followed her example. Hearing of this, the Excelsiors chose yellow for their color, and had some flags made with the name put on in black.

"If only it doesn't rain," said Fred, and got up at five o'clock on Saturday morning to take a look at the sky. It was somewhat cloudy and he heaved a mountainous sigh. But by nine o'clock the clouds rolled away and the sun came out brightly for the rest of the day.

Joe had called the club together for practice at ten o'clock and quite a few were present to watch the boys on the ball field.

"They do first rate," said one who was watch-

ing. "But I don't know as they are doing any better than Voup's crowd."

"I don't think they do as well," answered somebody else.

These remarks reached Link's ears and troubled him not a little. As soon as the practice was over he told some of his chums of them.

"You mustn't pay attention to all you hear, Link," said Fred. "Why, folks say all sorts of things when there are rivals in the field. Just look at it when we have a Presidential election. Some men will say all sorts of bad things about one candidate and others say bad things about the other candidate. After the election the defeated candidate is considered a pretty good fellow anyway."

It is more than likely that some of the members of the club ate but little dinner on that all-important Saturday. By two o'clock all were at the clubroom, getting into their uniforms and listening to Joe's final words of advice.

"Above all things, don't get rattled," Joe was saying. "If you allow yourselves to get rattled

you'll surely go to pieces and lose. Try to keep cool no matter what happens. And if you see me getting rattled don't hesitate to tell me so. If any two of you want another pitcher or catcher, I'll make the change."

At last they were ready to leave the clubroom and marched off by twos, with Teddy Dugan carrying the bats and a colored youth named Sam Snuff the other paraphernalia and a pail for drinking water.

"Dis am de time dat dis club wipes up de floah wid dem Excelsiors," said Sam Snuff. "Da won't be enuf left ob dem to hab a funeral wid."

When the boys arrived at the ball field of their rivals they found a large crowd collected. The grand stand was comfortably filled, and in a prominent place they saw Mr. Corsen and a number of other friends. Laura was also there, with eight other girls, all with their flags of blue. Opposite were some girls with their flags of yellow. Some boys had horns and others had rattles, and a mighty noise went up as the Lakeports appeared. Then another roar followed for the Excelsiors.

"I guess everybody in Lakeport is here," said Frank, looking around. "Who ever saw such a crowd before?"

"That shows what folks think of baseball," answered Walter. "It's the great national game, no doubt of that."

A man named Hayward had already been chosen to act as umpire. He was an old ballplayer, having played on the Eastern League for six years. He knew some of the boys fairly well, but said he was going to "play no favorites."

"What you get you've got to earn," he said, and with this Joe said he would be perfectly satisfied. Si Voup had wanted a particular friend of his to be umpire, but this the Lakeports would not allow.

"All of you fellows will get a square deal, don't you worry," said one man in the crowd. "If you don't, we'll mob the umpire."

By a toss-up it was decided that the Lakeports should go to the bat first. Each side was allowed fifteen minutes for practice. Both clubs did their best and various were the comments made.

"Pretty well matched," said one gentleman to Mr. Corsen. "What do you think?"

"I think the team work of the Lakeports is a little the better of the two," was the reply.

"And I was thinking just the opposite."

Just then an easy fly was knocked to Paul Shale, but for some unknown reason he missed it. A groan went up.

"Take that wooden man out of centerfield!"

Missing the fly made Paul wake up and he made a resolve that he would miss no flies when the game began.

At last the time for practice came to an end and the umpire sent the Excelsiors into the field.

"Batter up!" he called out, and Walter Bannister, who was looked upon as the heaviest hitter on the Lakeports, came to the plate. As he took his position his friends gave him a warm welcome.

"Make it a homer, Walter!"

"Sock it for keeps, old man!"

"Play!" called out the umpire.

Si Voup was the pitcher for his club, and it may be added here that he could really handle the ball

with considerable skill. Eyeing the home plate for an instant, he let drive with all of his speed.

"Ball one!" called out the umpire. "Too high."

"Make him give you what you want, Walter!" cried a friend.

Again the ball was delivered and around came Walter's bat to meet it.

"Strike one!"

"That's the way to do it, Si! Strike him out!" cried a friend of the Excelsiors' pitcher.

Once more the ball was delivered. It was just right for Walter and he gave it a rap that sent it high up over the pitcher's head. But the Excelsior's second baseman was on the alert and caught the ball as it came down close to him.

"The first victim!" shouted a boy. "That's the way to do it! Treat the others the same way!"

"Don't crow so early in the game," answered a Lakeport sympathizer, in disgust.

Bart was the second player to the bat. He had a strike and two balls called on him and then sent a short liner to third. It was quickly gobbled up

and sent to first while he was still ten feet from the bag.

"Victim number two!" called out somebody. "What did I tell you?"

Bart was followed by Fred who, after knocking two fouls, managed to get to first on a fumble by the second baseman. But before Fred could get to second the next man at the bat, Matt Roscoe, went out on a short hit direct into the pitcher's hands.

A mighty cheer went up for the Excelsiors. The first half of the initial inning was over and they had not allowed their opponents to score.

"It's a walkover," said Sidney Yates to Si Voup, when they walked over to the players' bench. "We've got them beat sure."

"Sure we have," said Voup, in his bragging way. "The championship is ours."

"Joe, we must do as well as they did," said Fred, as he buckled on his chest protector and adjusted his mask.

"We'll do what we can," answered Joe.

It must be confessed that he was just a bit nervous as he walked down to the pitcher's box. He

knew that the eyes of all assembled were upon him.

The first batter up for the Excelsiors was a fellow named Harrison, who had the reputation of being a strong hitter. He was in addition a good deal of a bully and he glared ominously at Joe as he took his position beside the home plate.

The glance from Harrison put Joe on his mettle and looking around first to see that all of his players were in position, he sent in his swiftest ball.

"Strike one!" called out the umpire, although Harrison had not attempted to use his bat.

"It was too high!" growled the batter.

"No, it wasn't!" answered the umpire. "Shut up!"

Again the ball came in and Harrison struck at it and missed it. It was pretty high, but Fred managed to grab and hold it.

"Strike two!"

"Strike him out, Joe!" called a boy in the crowd.

"Keep cool, Harrison!" came from Voup.

Once more the ball was delivered and this time the first batter for the Excelsiors managed to connect with it and drive it down to rightfield.

"Hurrah!" came in a wild yell. "Good for Harrison! Make it a two-bagger, old man!"

It was certainly a base hit and Harrison got to first base with ease. Then he tried to steal to second. But the ball came in with a rush and he was put out several feet from the base, while trying to get back to first.

"Never mind, he hit it all right enough," said Yates.

"Why didn't you stay at first?" growled Voup, when Harrison came in and sank on the bench in disgust.

"Oh, I thought I had time. Besides, my foot slipped," was the surly answer.

The second batter had a strike called on him and then managed to get to first on a short hit to left field. The batter to follow went out on a foul tip which Fred captured in a style that earned him quite some applause.

Joe was watching the runner on first, but de-

spite his best efforts to catch him the runner managed to get down to second and then up to third.

"Play the runner!" he said to those covering the infield. Then he delivered one of his swiftest balls. But by good luck the batter sent it down to left of center and managed to get to first. In the meantime the runner at third slid in to the home plate.

The Excelsiors had scored the first run.

CHAPTER XIII.

PAUL'S GREAT CATCH.

THERE was a tremendous cheering from those who favored Si Voup's club, while the Lakeport sympathizers were correspondingly silent.

"The Excelsiors get the first run!"

"They are going to win this game sure!"

The Lakeport players were much crestfallen, but did their best not to show it.

While the cheering was going on and Joe was preparing to pitch once more the runner at first tried to steal to second. Like lightning Joe delivered the sphere into the hands of Link and the runner was put out. This brought the first inning to a close. A score board had been erected, and up went the score, in chalk:

Excelsiors 1
Lakeports 0

"That's hard luck, no use of talking," said

Bart, as he came in. "Boys, we must do something this inning."

"If we can," added Paul.

"No use of getting discouraged," came cheerfully from Harry. "This game is young yet."

Frank Pemberton was the first player to bat in the second inning.

"Here comes Cheeky," cried one of his friends. "He'll show 'em a trick or two."

"Another victim!" roared an Excelsior enthusiast.

The run gained made Si Voup feel good and he walked to the box feeling very important. Then he sent in an outer curve.

"Ball one!" called the umpire.

Again the ball came in and Frank did not try to hit it.

"Ball two!"

"What's the matter with that?" growled Si.

"Too far out," said the umpire.

Once more the sphere was delivered. It was in the right place and Frank rapped it good and hard and sent it sailing far out into left field.

"Good!" came the shout. "Run, Cheeky, run!"

And Frank did run for all he was worth. First was gained, then second, and he slid to third in safety.

"A three-base hit!"

"Now where are you, Excelsiors?"

"You've got 'em started, boys; keep it up."

Harry was the next player to bat and as he came up Laura waved her flag at her brother.

Harry tried to keep cool, but his heart was thumping madly. He let the first ball pass him.

"One strike!"

Again the ball came in. It was not exactly what he wanted, but he landed on it almost desperately and sent it along the ground between first and second base. The first baseman ran for it, while Voup started to cover the bag. But before anything could be done Harry was safe and Frank had come in home.

"A run for Lakeport!"

"Why didn't you put the ball home?" cried the Excelsior catcher, angrily, for the sphere had been sent to Voup instead of to him.

"I couldn't get the man from third," growled the first baseman, yet he knew in his heart that he had made a wrong play.

Joe followed his brother, but as luck would have it was caught out on a pop fly to shortstop. Then Voup put in his swiftest ball, the catcher threw it to second, and Harry was caught just as he was trying to steal that bag. Link was at the bat and he went out an instant later on three strikes; and this finished the first half of the second inning.

"Never mind, we have evened up the score," said Joe. "Frank, that was a dandy hit and no mistake."

When they came to the bat the Excelsiors did their best to get in two runs, but there was a triple play between the first and second basemen and the shortstop of the Lakeports, and the runners failed to score. Then a short fly to third finished the inning. Once again the score went up on the board:

Excelsiors	1	0
Lakeports	0	1

"Anyway, that looks a little better," said Fred.

"It looks like a nip-and-tuck game," said Mr. Corsen to his gentleman friend. "Still, I bank on the Lakeports."

"And I am just as confident that the Excelsiors will win."

So far Paul Shale had not been to the bat, but now it was his turn to face Si Voup and he did it as calmly as possible. He had two strikes called on him and two balls and then knocked a little fly to first base.

"Come home!" cried somebody. "You don't know how to bat!" And Paul walked to the bench feeling very sore.

But the bad luck did not continue, and before the inning came to an end the Lakeports scored two runs. Then the Excelsiors made four runs. The score now read, Excelsiors 5, Lakeports 3, and our young friends felt rather glum.

"Brace up, fellows," said Joe. And then he added: "Do you want another pitcher or catcher?"

"No!" was the immediate answer. "You are all right."

During the next few innings there was a general see-sawing and half a dozen mildly exciting plays. There was also a dispute over a close decision on second base, but the umpire stood firm and the majority of the spectators sided with him. The score at the end of the seventh inning read, Excelsiors 8, Lakeports 5.

"This is a victory for the Excelsiors," said more than one. "The Lakeports can't catch up to them now. It's too late."

But in the eighth inning matters took a brighter turn for the Lakeports. Harry was first to the bat and knocked a clean base hit. The fielders fumbled the ball and he managed to get down to second. As before Joe followed him, and rapped a red-hot liner to shortstop. The Excelsior player could not hold the sphere, and while Joe reached first Harry went up to third. Then, while Link was at the bat, the catcher let the ball pass him and Harry came in, while Joe advanced to third base. The Excelsiors were now badly rattled and when the catcher threw the ball to Si Voup he missed it, and in the mixup Joe slid home.

"Hurrah for Lakeport! That's the way to do it!"

"Voup, put some glue on your hands! You'll be able to hold the ball better!"

Si Voup was so cut up that he began to pitch wildly and soon Link went to first base on balls. Then Paul came up and knocked a two-bagger, and Walter followed with a clean hit to center that brought him to second and helped to score two more runs. The Lakeport supporters were now cheering wildly and throwing up their hats.

"We've got 'em on the run!" cried Bart, excitedly. And when he came up he banged out another two-base hit, and a runner came in, adding another run to the score. But that was the end of the good luck, and they retired at the end of the first half of the eighth inning with the score standing, Excelsiors 8, Lakeports 10.

When the Excelsiors came up again it was with a "do or die" expression on their faces. One of their best batsmen was up and he managed to make a fine two-base hit which won great applause. Then came an out, followed by another hit, and

then a player got to first on balls. When the inning came to a close the score was a tie, 10 to 10.

The excitement all over the ball field was now intense. That the two clubs were closely matched there could no longer be any doubt. Many, however, considered that Joe was a slightly better pitcher than Si Voup.

Harry was now again to the bat and sent the ball down to right field, thereby gaining first. Joe followed with a fly to left field, but the fielder dropped the ball, and Joe got to first while his brother gained second. Then Link distinguished himself by a long drive to center which took him to second and brought in two runs. Again a wild cheering rent the air. Fearing they were going to lose, some of the players of the Excelsiors began to find fault with the runners.

"They cut third base," said Si Voup. "I saw them do it." But the runners had done nothing of the sort, and some spectators began to hiss at the pitcher. Then the umpire told them to play ball, and in a bad humor the Excelsiors did so. When

at last the first half of the ninth inning came to a close the score stood Excelsiors 10, Lakeports 13.

"I hope that proves a lucky thirteen," said Harry, as his club walked out into the field well satisfied with their score.

"If we could only shut them out this last inning!" came from Link.

If the Excelsiors had been anxious to score before, they were doubly anxious now, and Voup cautioned the first man up to do his very best. As a result the fellow made a safe hit and reached first.

"That's the way to start 'em up!" cried Sidney Yates, who was on the coaching line. "Show 'em how we have been fooling 'em, boys!" And then he continued to make all sorts of remarks, in an endeavor to rattle Joe.

The next player went out on a sacrifice hit, which he made contrary to Voup's orders. This took the man on first to second. The next batter hit the ball to left field, but only managed to reach first, while the other runner came home.

"Eleven to thirteen!" was the cry. "Now, Excelsiors, make those other two runs, and one over!"

Joe's heart was thumping wildly, but he did his best to steady himself. He pitched with all the speed left in his arm, and as a result the next man was struck out in quick order. At this the Excelsiors looked glum once more.

"One more out and the game will be over."

"It doesn't look as if the Excelsiors would make those runs now, does it?"

So the talk ran on, while the next player came up, and the man on first reached second. Then came a short hit. Link got the ball and threw it to third and the man on second stayed where he was.

"Go in for a home run!" shouted somebody in the crowd. A run of that sort meant three runs, for both first and second bases were now occupied by runners.

In the midst of the fever-heat of excitement one of the Excelsiors' best batsmen came to the plate. He had made a two and a three-base hit and every-

body felt that he could score a home run if given half a chance.

"I must be careful," thought Joe. He realized that his arm was not as limber as it had been. He had wanted to put Link in as pitcher the inning before, but the others would not have it.

Making certain that the runners were not "playing off" too far, he delivered the ball with care.

"One strike!" sang out the umpire, although the batsman had not moved his bat.

Again the ball was sent in. This time the bat came around, but the sphere was not touched.

"Two strikes!"

A murmur arose among the Excelsiors.

"Hit it, Wheeling; you've got to hit it!"

"Knock the cover off the ball!"

Again the ball came in just where Wheeling wished it. He reached out, and crack! the sphere went sailing high over second base and far out into centerfield.

"A home run!" came the cry. "A home run! The Excelsiors win this game."

"Run, fellows, run! There is nothing to stop you."

And the Excelsior players began to dance around like wild Indians. The two on the bases began to tear around the diamond like mad, with the lad who had hit the ball following.

Paul Shale saw the ball coming. He knew it would pass high over his head and down into deep center he went like the wind after it. He heard the crowd yell, but paid no attention to the rest of the players.

"I must get it! I must get it!" he said to himself, and the words fairly burnt themselves into his brain. He made leap after leap. The ball was coming down—it was still out of reach. He stumbled, but kept on—and then, just as the ball came within eight feet of the earth, he sprang up and clutched it in the fingers of one hand. Hardly had he done this than his feet struck a rock and he went down heavily. Then he rolled over on his back, but held the ball aloft.

"He has got it!"

"He caught that fly after all!"

"What a magnificent play! I never saw anything to match it!"

"Those runs don't count."

"Lakeport wins the game!"

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER.

It was true Lakeport had won by a score of 13 to 11. Si Voup tried to enter a protest, saying that Paul had let the ball drop and had then picked it up, but nobody would listen to him.

"It was a perfectly fair play," said the umpire. "I will leave it to the crowd. He fell down, but the ball never got within a foot of the ground."

The cheering was tremendous, and some of the boys wanted to carry Paul around on their shoulders, but he would not permit this.

"To catch that fly wasn't so much," said he modestly.

"It was the greatest thing that ever happened," answered Joe, enthusiastically. "We should have lost the game if it hadn't been for you."

"Great Cæsar, how Paul did leg it down into the field!" came from Frank. "I never saw anybody run so!"

"Well, I put him there for his running qualities," said Joe. "He's the best runner on our team," and the others agreed with their captain.

As soon as they saw that they were beaten the Excelsiors lost no time in leaving the ball field. Only the boy who had charge of the grand stand remained, and he turned over to the Lakeports the amount of the receipts coming to them, eighteen dollars and forty cents.

"I don't care a rap for the money," said Harry, on the way back to the clubroom. "But I can tell you it was a big thing to defeat Voup's crowd."

To celebrate the victory the club members spent two dollars for cake, fruit, and lemons and sugar for lemonade. This gave them quite a spread, which all enjoyed to the utmost.

"Dat was a bang up game, dat was!" declared Teddy Dugan. He was so hoarse from "rooting" that he could scarcely speak.

"We should have lost if it hadn't been for that

catch by Paul," said Augustus De Vere. was angry because he had not been called upon to play.

The game became the talk of the town, and the Excelsiors were asked all sorts of questions by those who had been foolish enough to bet and who had lost. Let it be said here that none of the Lakeport Club had bet.

"Oh, my arm wasn't in just the right condition," grumbled Si Voup. "Just wait till the next game; then we'll show 'em a trick or two."

"I got something in my eye during the second inning and that bothered me," said Sidney Yates.

"One of those fellows spiked me with his shoe," said the Excelsior shortstop. "After that I could scarcely walk." He had missed two "liners" and felt that he must excuse himself somehow.

Fred was so elated over the game that he could scarcely contain himself.

"It's just too good for anything," he said to his mother. "I wish you had been there."

"Isn't this the first of three games, Fred?"

"Yes, mother."

"Then you must win one more to be the champions of the town."

"We are sure to do that."

"Don't be so positive, Fred. If you lose you will be heart-broken."

On Monday Fred had to go to the saw-mill for his parents, and while there he fell in with Sidney Yates, whose father was the superintendent at the mill.

"It was a great game, wasn't it, Sidney?" said the stout youth, pleasantly.

"Oh, you needn't blow to me about your ball playing!" grumbled Sidney.

"I'm not blowing. I think you fellows put up a pretty good game."

"We should have won if it hadn't been for the umpire," returned the other boy, sourly.

"I think the umpire was very fair."

"His decisions were rank. We will never have him for an umpire again."

"Perhaps we shall."

"Not much! Paul Shale dropped that ball and I saw it."

"Never!"

"I say he did drop it!" roared Sidney, who was in thoroughly bad humor. "You fellows are a lot of low upstarts," he added.

"Do you mean to call me an upstart?" cried Fred, his anger rising at the insult.

"Yes, I do."

"Take that back, Sidney Yates! If you don't——" Fred paused and clenched his fists.

"What will you do?" demanded Sidney impudently. He was several inches taller than Fred.

"I'll make you take it back."

"Ho! ho! what talk!" roared Sidney. "I'd like to see you make me take it back, you fat crab, you!"

Now, although Fred was stout, he hated to be called fat, and without further ado he pitched into Sidney and struck him on the shoulder. The other lad retaliated, and in a moment more the quarrel became exceedingly warm. Fred was struck on the arm and in the cheek, and he hit Sidney in the left eye and on the nose.

"Oh!" yelled Sidney, as the blood spurted from

his nasal organ. "Don't you dare to hit me in the nose again!"

"Do you take back what you said about me?" demanded Fred, watching for a chance to strike once more.

"No, I don't!"

"Then take that!" said the stout youth, and aimed a blow at his opponent's chin. Sidney ducked and Fred's fist landed on the nose again, hurting worse than ever. Then Sidney began to back away.

"I'm not going to let you get away so easily," cried Fred and followed the other boy up. Sidney backed up against a log and pitched flat on his back and Fred lost no time in pinning him to the earth.

"Now, will you take it back, Sidney Yates?"

"Let—let me up!"

"Not until you take back what you said."

"The ground is all wet and muddy here."

"That isn't my fault."

"My suit will be ruined. It's a new suit, too!"

"That's your lookout, not mine."

"I'll call my father!"

"If you do, I'll tell him what you said of me."

"Help! help!" roared Sidney, and then he began to squirm harder than ever. In the midst of the tussle three men ran from the mill.

"Here, what does this mean?" demanded one of the men, as Fred continued to hammer Sidney.

"He called me a low upstart," answered the stout youth.

"Make him leave me up, father!" whined Sidney.

"Bless me, if it isn't Sidney!" ejaculated Mr. Yates. "Let him alone!" The latter words to Fred, who quickly arose. "What's this? Sidney, your new suit is all plastered with mud!"

"He fell down himself," answered Fred.

"Who started this fight?" asked another of the men.

"He did," answered Sidney, promptly.

"He called me a low upstart. I'll allow nobody to call me that," came from Fred, whose eyes were still flashing.

"Sidney, did you call Fred that?" demanded

Mr. Yates. He was a fair-minded man and knew something of his son's disposition.

"No."

"And I say he did," retorted Fred. "He said the members of our baseball club were a lot of low upstarts. He is mad because we beat his club last Saturday."

Just then a man who had been standing back of a nearby lumber pile came forward.

"That lad speaks the truth," he said, pointing to Fred. "That boy taunted him with being a low upstart. I heard every word of the quarrel."

At this exposure Sidney gazed at his father for a moment and then hung his head.

"I'm ashamed of you, my son," said Mr. Yates. "You had no business to use such language."

"Well, they tricked us out of that game," whined Sidney.

"No, they didn't. The game was honestly won. You go right home and change your clothes, and to-night I'll talk this over with you."

"Ain't you going to punish Fred?"

"No, because you started the quarrel," answer-

ed Mr. Yates, and then Sidney sneaked off like a whipped puppy. But once behind the lumber piles, he shook his fist savagely at Fred.

"Just you wait, Fred Rush, I'll fix you for this!" he cried to himself.

As soon as the excitement was over Fred transacted his business at the mill and then walked towards home. On the way he met Link and Harry. He told them of the encounter with Sidney.

"I'm glad you tackled him," said Link. "If he ever talks that way to me I'll do something he won't like."

"Sidney is a blower," said Harry. "I guess most of the boys know him by this time. I don't see how Si Voup can put up with him."

"Because he is willing to do anything for Si," came from Link. "They are hand-in-glove and always have been."

That evening, when Mr. Yates came home, he read Sidney a stern lecture. The boy tried to answer back, and as a result Mr. Yates told him he must come to the mill and go to work during the vacation.

"I am not going to have you idling your time away and getting into trouble," said Mr. Yates.

"But the ball club——" began Sidney. "I want some time to practice——"

"You must resign your position. They can get somebody in your place," was the firm answer, and this decision, although it almost broke Sidney's heart, was final.

CHAPTER XV.

SWIMMING IN THE LAKE.

Of course the boys, although they were much interested in their club, did not feel like playing ball all the time, and one bright day Joe, Fred and Bart went out on the lake to put in a day at fishing. They took a generous lunch with them, and left word that they might not be back until dark.

"They say fishing is very good over towards Bartlett Point," said Fred. "Suppose we try our luck there?"

"One place will suit me as well as another," came from Joe.

"What we want is a big mess of fish," put in Bart. "Frank and Walter were out yesterday, and they each got a dandy string. One had twelve and the other fifteen, and all pretty good size, too."

Bartlett Point was about a mile and a half away,

but all of the boys were good rowers and thought nothing of covering that distance. They had two pairs of oars and took turns at handling the blades.

"It is queer we haven't heard anything of the *Sprite,*" remarked Joe, while on the way. "You wouldn't think the sloop could be so completely swallowed up."

"Not unless she is at the bottom of the lake," answered Bart. "You must remember that this pond is rather deep in some spots."

As soon as Bartlett Point was gained they found a convenient spot where to fish and went at the pleasure without delay.

But, though they had hoped to make some hauls at once, ten minutes passed and they did not get so much as a nibble.

"Somebody in this crowd is a Jonah!" grumbled Joe.

"We must all be it," grinned Fred, "since nobody has a bite."

"Let us go up the shore a short distance," suggested Bart.

This suggestion was carried out, and inside of half an hour they located a spot where fishing proved to be excellent. They drew up some perch, some lake trout and rock bass, and Bart also landed a big fish which he could not exactly identify.

"This is what I call sport!" cried Joe, enthusiastically. "Nine fish already and we haven't been at it an hour and a half all told!"

"Don't be too hilarious," cautioned Bart. "Our luck may desert us."

By noon the boys had a beautiful mess of the finny tribe, and then they elected to go ashore, start up a camp-fire and cook three of the small fish to eat with the lunch they had brought along.

The boat was drawn up under some brushwood, and soon they were making themselves thoroughly at home. The fish were done to a turn and proved particularly appetizing. For dessert they had green apple pie, which, to use Fred's manner of expressing it, "just touched the spot."

"What do you say to a swim, fellows?" said Bart, after the meal was over.

"Just the ticket!" ejaculated Fred. "Come on!"

"Better wait awhile," cautioned Joe. "It is not healthy to go in directly after eating."

"Oh, pshaw! I don't believe that," answered Bart, who had his coat already off. "Come on."

He was soon ready for the plunge and Fred followed. Seeing this, Joe could not help doing the same, and inside of ten minutes all three of the lads were in the water, plunging, swimming, laughing and shouting to their hearts' content. The water was just cold enough to be bracing.

"Never had a better swim in my life!" declared Fred. "Who is in for a race?"

"I'll race you!" came from Bart.

"Count me in, too, Fred," added Joe.

"Where shall we race to?"

"See that old tree stump out there?"

"Yes."

"Well, let us swim to that and back to this rock. The first fellow to do it wins the race."

All were willing, and at the word from Fred each struck out as best he could. Soon Bart was in

the lead, with Joe not far behind him. Fred was too stout to make rapid headway, and it is doubtful if he had any notion of winning the race when he suggested it.

"Come on, Fred, we'll show you the way!" shouted Bart, merrily.

"Don't—don't say a word!" spluttered the stout youth. "I'm watching to see that you swim fair!"

"Take care that we don't swim out of sight!" sang out Joe, gleefully.

He began to swim faster than before, and soon his sturdy strokes took him alongside of Bart. Both touched the tree trunk at the same time.

"Now for the home stretch!" cried Bart. And he struck out harder than ever.

Joe also turned, and both swam a distance of several yards.

"Where is Fred?" suddenly ejaculated Bart.

"Fred?"

"Yes. I can't see him anywhere."

"He must be somewhere." Joe lost interest in

the race at once. "Fred, where are you?" he called out.

No answer came back and now Bart also shouted. Both boys gazed at each other in unexpected terror.

"There he is!"

"Help!" came faintly from the stout youth. His head had bobbed up for only an instant, and now he sank beneath the surface of the lake again.

"He has a cramp, that's what's the matter!" came from Joe. "Bart, we'll have to get him out!"

"To be sure!"

Both lost no time in swimming to where they had last seen the stout youth.

"Do you see him now?"

"No."

"Let us dive."

This was quickly agreed upon, and down went both boys only a couple of yards apart. The water was fairly clear, and soon Joe caught sight of Fred, doubled up with his knees to his chin. As he caught hold of his chum Fred clutched him madly around the neck.

It was an easy matter to drag the imperiled youth to the surface, but Joe could not break that hold and was in danger of being strangled. As Bart came up he shouted to his friend for assistance.

"Gracious! but he has 'em bad!" was Bart's comment, and then he swam in and tried to break Fred's hold. He succeeded sufficiently for Joe to regain his breath, and then both boys lost no time in hauling Fred to the shore, where they laid him out on the grass and began to rub him.

"Oh!" groaned Fred, when he could speak. "What a horrible experience!"

"I should say it was horrible," answered Bart. "How do you feel?"

"As if I had been tied in a double knot!"

"It was the dinner did it," said Joe. "I told you not to go in so soon."

"I might have drowned if it hadn't been for you," continued Fred, with a grateful look at first one and then the other.

"It was certainly a close call," answered Bart. "Why didn't you yell when you were first taken?"

"I didn't have time. It came on me like a streak of lightning. I couldn't strike out or use my voice."

"You had better put on your clothing," said Joe.

"I will. I shan't want to go swimming again this summer," and the stout youth gave a shudder.

"Well, I've had enough myself just for the present," put in Bart. "To witness something like this takes all the nerve out of a chap."

Both Joe and Bart gave Fred a good rubbing down and assisted him into his clothing. Then they dressed themselves.

"How do you feel now?" asked Joe.

"All right, only a little weak in the legs and the stomach."

"You needn't to row," put in Bart. "We'll do that. You can take it easy."

"Let us rest for awhile in the sun," said Joe. "It will do us all good."

The others were willing, and they threw themselves on a sloping hill where the sun shone bright-

ly, and where they could get a good view of the surrounding country.

Just to the north of them was a creek which ran into Pine Lake. On both sides of the watercourse were trees and thick bushes.

"There used to be some wild blackberries around here," remarked Joe, presently. "Wonder if we can find any ripe ones?"

"Haven't you had enough to eat?" asked Bart.

"Oh, a handful of berries isn't very filling. We might take some home. My folks—— Well, I declare!"

Joe stopped short and sprang to his feet, gazing in the neighborhood of the creek.

"What's the matter, Joe?"

"Did you see that man who just came from the creek and ran into yonder woods?"

"I didn't see anybody," answered Fred.

"Neither did I," declared Bart.

"He was a young fellow and, unless I am greatly mistaken, it was Dan Marcy."

"Marcy!" came from the others.

"Yes."

"What can he be doing here?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"We ought to follow him."

"All right."

In a moment more they had set off for the woods into which the stranger had disappeared. But they could not follow the fellow and soon gave up the hunt.

"Did he see us?" asked Fred.

"I don't know. But he seemed to be in a tremendous hurry to get out of sight."

"Then he must have seen us."

"If it was Marcy, perhaps the *Sprite* is somewhere around here," came from Bart, after a pause.

"That is exactly what I was thinking," answered Joe.

"Let us go on the hunt for the sloop," came from Fred. "Perhaps she is hidden up that creek."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FINDING OF THE SLOOP.

As said before, the trees and bushes lining the creek on both sides were very close together, and the three boys had all they could do to get through to the edge of the water.

"We would have done better had we rowed up the creek in our rowboat," said Joe. "Wait a minute, I am all twisted up in this bramble bush."

"Here is some fine sassafras," came from Bart. "Wait till I get some to chew on." And they all stopped until he had cut some tender shoots for each. Then they walked on until they came out on a bit of a clearing close to the water's edge.

"This looks like a wild goose chase," said Fred. He had stepped into a deep hole and covered one foot with mud, which put him in anything but an agreeable frame of mind.

"This is the spot where Dan Marcy came from," said Joe. "Let us walk up the creek a bit further."

"Hullo, what's this?" cried Bart, a second later. "A paint pot, I declare, and with a little fresh paint in it. How did that get here?"

"We must be on the right track!" shouted Joe.

"How do you make that out, Joe?"

"Don't you see? If the *Sprite* is here Marcy must be painting her over and giving her a new name."

"That's so!" ejaculated Fred. "That's just the color a fellow might use in painting a sloop."

They hurried on, and presently came to a sharp turn where the bushes were thicker than ever.

"You can't get through there," declared Bart.

"If I can't I'm going to swim up the creek," came from Joe. "I am positive we are on the right trail."

"There is something of a path," said Fred, pointing to one side. "It seems to follow the creek, too. It cuts off this elbow."

They turned into the path, and this brought

them back to the creek at another point. Hardly had they come in sight of the water again than Joe set up a ringing shout:

"There she is! What did I tell you!"

"The *Sprite,* as sure as guns!" came from Bart.

"Won't Paul and his uncle be glad to learn of this," added Fred.

A glance sufficed to show them that the craft was deserted. She had been run up into the creek as far as possible, and the trees and bushes all but hid her from view. Her sides were in two colors—the old on one and the new on the other. The new paint was not yet dry.

"Is anybody around?" asked Bart, in a whisper.

"I don't see anybody," answered Joe. "Wait till we investigate."

They approached the sloop with caution, but soon ascertained that nobody was aboard the craft. Then they mounted to the deck, Bart getting some of the new paint on his hands as he did so.

"I believe this was painted this morning," said he, as he was cleaning his hands. "We got here

just in time. If the sloop was painted and had a new name how could one tell her?"

"Perhaps Paul's uncle could tell her. He knows his craft pretty well."

"He might and he might not. Marcy could cut down the mast a little and lengthen the bowsprit, and do things like that, and then nobody would know the boat."

"Well, we nipped the plan in the bud," said Joe. "And the best thing we can do is to get the sloop out on the lake and sail her to Lakeport."

"And win the reward!" cried Fred.

"It wouldn't be fair for us to claim that reward," put in Bart, quickly. "We helped to lose the sloop in the first place."

"Of course. I was only fooling. But we are going to have our hands full getting the sloop out into the lake."

"Let us bring around the rowboat," suggested Joe. "Then we can use a rope and pull her out."

"By rowing?" queried Bart.

"Oh, no, by carrying the rope forward and catching it around a tree."

This was considered a good plan, and Joe went off to get the rowboat. Soon he came up the creek, and as he drew closer they fastened a rope to the stern of the *Sprite* and threw the other end to him. Then all leaped aboard the rowboat and carried the rope to a tree fifty feet away.

At first it was hard work to budge the sloop, but once she was started it was an easy matter to haul her down the creek to the lake. Then all went aboard, tying their rowboat on behind. The mainsail was hoisted, and with a fair breeze they were soon bowling merrily over the lake in the direction of Lakeport.

"We didn't get quite as many fish as we expected," said Bart. "But we got a haul all right, didn't we?"

"Won't Marcy be mad when he hears that his sloop is gone," said Fred. "That is, if it really was Marcy."

"I am pretty certain it was Marcy," answered Joe. "Still, I shouldn't like to go into court to prove it."

As they sailed down the lake they looked the

Sprite over carefully to see if the thief had left any trace of himself on board. But all they could find was a corn-cob pipe and a half paper of smoking tobacco, along with the crumbs and leavings of several meals.

"Nothing here," said Joe.

Their coming back to Lakeport in a sloop when they had gone out in a rowboat caused a mild flutter of excitement down at the docks and this was increased when it was learned that the missing *Sprite* had been found. A boy was at once despatched to tell Mr. Shale the news, and presently he appeared, followed by his nephew.

"This is great!" cried Paul, as he rushed on board.

"Where did you find the craft?" questioned Mr. Shale.

Their story was soon told, to which quite a gathering listened. But it was only to the gentleman himself and to Paul that they confided their suspicion that Dan Marcy had been the one to take the sloop.

"But I can't prove it," added Joe, "and that

being so, perhaps I had better keep my mouth shut about it."

"That is true, my lad," answered the owner of the sloop. "It would never do to accuse anybody wrongfully. Perhaps it will be a good plan to have this Marcy watched."

Mr. Shale wished to reward the boys, but they would not listen to it, and as a result he promised to take them out on the lake whenever they wanted to go.

"But the boat has got to be cleaned, scraped and painted first," he added. "I would never wish to use her in her present condition."

When the boys were walking home Fred called Joe and Bart to one side.

"Please don't say anything about that cramp I had," he whispered. "If my folks hear about it they will never let me go near the water again."

"All right, I shan't say a word," answered Joe. "But you want to be careful, Fred, about going into the water in the future."

"Yes, for we can't afford to lose you off the club," added Bart, and then he gave Fred's arm a

tight squeeze to show just what he did mean. He and the stout youth thought a great deal of each other.

The members of the Lakeport Baseball Club had sent a challenge to the Brookside nine, offering to play a game on some Saturday afternoon in the near future. An answer was received, choosing the following Saturday. The game was to be played at Brookside, where the local club had quite a nice grounds, although the grand stand was small.

"Now we are going up against a pretty good club," said Harry, after the acceptance was read.

"Do you think they are any better than the Excelsiors?" asked Link.

"They are just as good," put in Walter. "My cousin knows them and he says so."

The rivalry between Lakeport and Brookside had always been intense, and in both towns the boys did nothing but talk of the coming game. The majority of the lads in Lakeport were sure the local nine would be victorious, but this feeling was not shared by some of the members of the Excelsiors.

"Humph! they can't win!" sneered Si Voup. "Just wait and see. Brookside will wax 'em out of their boots!"

"Just what I say," said another player. "The Brookside fellows are at it nearly every day. Their team work is almost perfect."

"Yes, and they have a fellow who can pitch the nastiest curve you ever went up against," put in another. "I'm going to bet on Brookside."

Sidney Yates was in the crowd, but he had little to say. The Excelsiors were going to play a team from Camdale that week, and it galled him exceedingly to think that he could not be on the team.

"It's all on account of that Fred Rush," he grumbled to himself. "And Fred is going to Brookside next Saturday to play, while I've got to stay at the mill and work! It's a shame! I wish I could spoil his fun for him."

From thinking of Fred, Sidney got to thinking of the other members of the Lakeport nine, and he soon reached the conclusion that he hated them all.

"Oh, if I could only do something to spoil that

game for them!" he told himself. "If I could only do something!"

When a person wishes to do wrong it is usually not long before an opportunity presents itself. Sidney went past the Darrow homestead that afternoon and saw some of the club members in front of the carpenter shop, dusting and cleaning their baseball suits, which were usually kept on hooks in the club room, the association not having as yet had lockers built for that purpose."

"I've got it!" he told himself. "I wonder if I can work it? Oh, it's just the dandy scheme. Won't they feel sick all over when they find out what has happened!"

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH THE CLUB'S OUTFIT DISAPPEARS.

Sidney Yates was well acquainted with a boy some years younger than himself, named Billy Fram. Billy belonged to a family that had never held a very good name in Lakeport, and the boy often played truant from school and was known for his mean habits.

It was to Billy Fram that Sidney went after seeing the baseball club members cleaning and brushing up their suits for the game with Brookside. He had gone to Billy several times before and always got the boy to do some dirty piece of work for him. Sidney himself was too much of a coward to do what was now in his mind.

"Billy, I want you," he said.

"Wot yer want?" demanded Billy, suspiciously. He was "in hot water" so much he viewed every demand on him with suspicion.

"I want you to do something for me."

"Wot?"

"It isn't very much and I'll pay you handsomely for it," went on Sidney.

"All right, I'll do it," answered Billy promptly. "Is it old Jackson's cow ag'in?" He had once driven off a cow for Sidney and got five cents for it.

"No, it isn't the cow, it's something else."

"Well, tell me wot it is."

"You'll keep it to yourself, won't you?"

"Huh! Don't I allers keep things to myself?" grumbled Billy.

"If you'll do what I want done I'll give you ten cents."

" 'Tain't awful bad, is it?"

"No, it's only a little joke."

"I won't git took in fer it, will I?"

"Oh, no."

"Then I'll do it," answered Billy, readily.

"And you won't tell anybody about it, or that I put you up to it?"

"Course I won't."

"Well then, you know the boys of the Lakeport Baseball Club?"

"Sure—the Joe Westmore crowd."

"Yes. They have a clubroom upstairs in Mr. Darrow's carpenter shop."

"Yes, I know dat, too."

"In their clubroom they keep their uniforms."

"All right, let 'em keep 'em."

"But I want you to get the uniforms."

"Wot, you want me ter steal 'em?"

"Oh, no. I want you to get them and hide them, so that when they start to play ball with the Brooksides next Saturday they'll have to do it in their street clothes."

"Oh, dat's de wrinkle, eh? Where do yer want me to hide 'em?"

Sidney looked around, to make sure that nobody was close by, and then whispered something into the other boy's ear.

"It will be dead easy," he continued. "You can do it some time to-morrow."

"Yes, if de carpenter shop ain't locked," returned Billy.

"I know where they keep the key—close to Mrs. Darrow's washhouse door."

"It's a big risk. If I do dat I want twenty-five cents," said Billy, after considering the matter.

"No, I'll give you ten."

"Make it twenty?"

"No."

"All right den, I won't do it."

"I'll give you fifteen cents," said Sidney, and at last Billy said he would undertake the task for that sum and received five cents on account, which he lost no time in spending for candy and a doughnut.

Billy thought that early in the morning would be a good time to visit the carpenter shop, and he was in that vicinity by half-past seven o'clock. He saw Mr. Darrow and two workmen go away to their daily labors. One of the workmen hung the key in the accustomed place, and, watching his chance, the lad procured it without much trouble. Then he hung around until he was certain nobody was looking, and made his way into the building and upstairs to the clubroom.

On a dozen hooks of a side wall hung the uni-

forms, all ready to be donned on the following Saturday morning, when the club would start up the lake for Brookside. Working with all the haste possible, Billy caught them into a bundle and ran to a rear window of the shop. He let them fall on the ground below and then dropped down gloves, masks and the rest of the club outfit.

As has been mentioned before, there was an old-fashion cistern behind the carpenter shop. It was not used, but Mr. Darrow kept it full of water, thinking that it might be a handy thing in case of fire in the shop. It was surrounded by a low, square box, having a hinged lid on the top.

Sneaking downstairs, Billy locked the door of the shop and put the key where he had found it. Then he ran to the rear of the shop and gathered up the uniforms and other things and carried them over to the cistern.

"I hope nobody ain't seein' me!" he muttered, anxiously. "Dis ain't no little trick ter do, dis ain't!"

He opened the lid of the cistern and gazed down into the opening. Then he looked around the yard.

The outfit disappears.

Nobody was in sight. He gathered up the uniforms, masks, gloves and other things, and down went the whole outfit of the club into the water. This done, he closed the lid of the cistern quickly, and lost no time in scooting down through a wagon way which led to a back street of the town. On a corner he met Sidney, on his way to the mill.

"It's done," he said, briefly. "I want me money."

"You took every uniform?"

"Yes, an' de udder t'ings, too."

"And put everything into the cistern?"

"Yes. Where's de money you promised me fer de job?"

"Here it is," and Sidney passed the amount over in pennies.

"It ought to be more."

"That is what I promised you. I am not going to pay more," answered Sidney, firmly.

"Don't you ever lay dis on to me," said Billy, on parting. "If you do I'll tell folks you set me up to it." And then he passed out of hearing before Sidney could answer back.

The trick had been played on Friday morning, and as it happened none of the members of the baseball club chanced to go up to the clubroom until late in the afternoon.

"Hullo, where are the uniforms and the rest of the things?" queried Bart.

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Fred, who was with him.

"Maybe Joe or Link took them to have them brightened up," suggested Walter.

"The uniforms were cleaned the other day," answered Bart.

"Well, they are gone."

"Yes, I can see that as well as you can. Here comes Harry. Let us ask him about this."

"Why, I don't know anything about this," said Harry, when questioned. "Aren't any of you fooling?"

"I'm not."

"Neither am I."

"Then let us ask the other fellows. Perhaps somebody has stolen the outfit."

"Stolen it!" came from nearly all of the others.

Harry had left Joe and Matt down at the corner, and he lost no time in interviewing them. The news spread, and soon every member of the team but Teddy Dugan was present.

"This is either a trick, or else the outfit has been stolen," declared Joe, bitterly.

"Maybe the Excelsiors know something about it," suggested Link. "Wait till I ask my mother about the key. Fred, did you find it in the usual place?"

"I did."

Mrs. Darrow and also her hired girl were appealed to, but both declared they knew nothing of the affair. They had seen no stranger take the key.

"This is the worst yet!" groaned Frank. "If we can't get those uniforms back, what are we to do? We can't go to Brookside in our regular clothes."

"Maybe the Excelsiors will lend us their uniforms?" came from one of the club members.

"Not much! They don't like us well enough, and, besides, they are going to play a game themselves," answered another.

"Let us take a look around the shop," suggested Harry. "They may be hidden close at hand."

The suggestion was followed out, and they looked high and low around the building and even under it, and also in the yard and in the woodshed. Joe glanced into the cistern, but the outfit had sunk out of sight and he saw nothing but muddy water.

"This beats the cars!" exclaimed Bart, sitting down on a saw-horse to rest. "What in the world are we to do, fellows?"

"Don't ask me," responded Matt. "We can't even hire other uniforms, so far as I know."

"They'll laugh at us if we go to Brookside in our plain clothes," put in Paul.

It soon became noised around the vicinity that the outfit of the club was missing, and several men and boys joined in the search, which was continued until dark. Then the club members locked up the shop once more and each went home to get supper.

"If this isn't a measly shame then I don't know what is," declared Joe. "I thought we'd be able

to make a fine appearance when we went out of town for the first time."

"We might get out our old hunting knickerbockers and sweaters," said his brother. "They would be better than our street clothes."

"Yes, but no two sweaters are alike."

"I know that."

"For two pins I'd send a message to the Brooksides, asking them to postpone the game."

"Well, we might do that," answered Harry, and there the unsatisfactory conversation came to an end.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN EXPOSURE, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

FRANK PEMBERTON was just finishing his supper when he heard a well-known whistle outside of his gate, and lost no time in answering the boyish call. Outside he found a lad named Charlie Crown awaiting him. Charlie was about Frank's age. He was a cripple and could not play ball or other games, but took a great interest in the athletic sports.

"What's up, Charlie?" asked Frank, as he met the cripple near the gate.

"I want to see you," was the low answer. "I've got something to tell."

"All right, fire away," answered Frank, and walked away from the gate with the other boy.

"I want you to promise that you won't tell anybody first," went on Charlie. "The reason I ask is, because I don't want to get into trouble."

"I shan't get you into trouble if I can help it, Charlie."

"It's about those lost uniforms and other things that belong to your baseball club."

"What about them?" and now Frank was all curiosity.

"They are really gone, aren't they?"

"Yes."

"Well, I was down near Hatfield's lumber yard this morning, and I heard something that I didn't think much of just then, but I think more of it now."

"What did you hear?"

"Something that was said between Sidney Yates and Billy Fram." And then the cripple related the conversation recorded in the previous chapter.

"Put everything in the cistern?" cried Frank. "They must have meant the cistern back of the carpenter shop."

"Is there one there?"

"Yes."

"Then that must be it."

"I'll go and find out at once."

"You won't say that I told you, will you?" asked Charlie, anxiously. "If Sidney heard of it he'd hammer the life out of me the first chance he got."

"I'd like to catch him at it," returned Frank, with flashing eyes. "If he ever lays his hands on you just you let me know. But I won't mention you if you'd rather have it that way."

Fearful that he might be suspected of exposing the plot, Charlie declined to go to the carpenter shop, so Frank started off alone. On the way he picked up Matt and Fred, and at the shop Link joined them.

"We'll have to get a lantern to look into the old cistern," said Link. "It's as dark as pitch down there. What a mean thing to do!"

A lantern was procured and lit, and the crowd of boys hurried to the cistern and raised the lid.

"Put the lantern on the end of a pole," suggested Frank. "We can't see anything unless it is close to the water."

"I think we can get the whole cistern top off," added Link. "That will help so much more."

With the top removed, and the lantern lowered on a pole, it was not long before they discovered one of the uniforms floating around in the water. This they fished out with a clothes pole having a nail at the end, and several other uniforms and a catcher's mask followed.

"This was the plan," cried Link. "It beats anything I ever heard of for meanness. We ought to have Billy Fram and Sidney Yates arrested!"

"What we want to do first is to make sure that all of the things are here," came from Matt. "Keep on fishing, boys!" And the way he said this caused a brief laugh.

They did keep on fishing, and in the end brought out all of the uniforms and nearly all of the rest of the club outfit. Several gloves could not be gotten and these were left at the bottom of the cistern for the time being.

"These suits are a sight to see," declared Link. "They must be washed and dried before we can use them."

"They certainly have got to be washed," returned another of the boys.

"I've got a plan!" cried Frank. "Let us march to Mr. Yates' house and show him just what was done. We can take the wet outfit with us."

This was agreed to, and Mr. Darrow, who had come out of the house to aid them, said he would go along.

It was quite a procession that lined up on the board walk of the Yates' home, which stood some distance back from the street. Frank rang the bell and Mr. Yates himself answered the summons.

"What's this?" cried the mill superintendent. "A surprise party?"

"If it is, it's a disagreeable one, Mr. Yates," said Frank. "We want to show you what sort of a trick Sidney has been playing on us—he and that Billy Fram."

"What are you doing with those wet clothes?"

"Sidney had Billy Fram steal them from our clubroom and throw them into Mr. Darrow's cistern."

Of course Mr. Yates was astonished, and at first

he would not believe what was told him. Sidney had gone out, but came back in the midst of the interview.

"See here, what does this mean?" demanded his father, catching him by the ear. "Answer me, did you do this?"

"Oh!" screamed Sidney. "Don't! I—I didn't do nothing!"

"He had it done, and we can prove it," answered Frank.

"I—I didn't do it!" Sidney was so scared he lost his head. "Billy Fram did it! Oh, let me go, please do!"

"Yes, but you paid Billy Fram to do it," put in Link. "You needn't deny it, for we can prove everything."

"Did Billy tell on me?" whined Sidney. "If he did I'll—I'll——"

"So you did have something to do with it, eh?" cried Mr. Yates. "A fine piece of business for you, I must say!"

"Billy did it. I didn't do it!"

"Yes, but you hired him to do it, and when it

was done you paid him money, too," came from Frank. "You ought to be in jail this minute!"

"I am going to get at the bottom of this," said Mr. Yates, in a hard voice, which made his son shiver. "Sidney, you ought to be ashamed of yourself." He turned to the boys and Mr. Darrow. "Where is this Billy Fram?"

"Here he is!" came a voice from the rear, and two of the club members, who had slipped off after the little rascal, marched up with the lad between them.

"It wasn't my fault!" sniveled Billy Fram. "Sidney said he had a right to do it—that the club hadn't treated him honestly. I wouldn't have done it on my own account nohow! It's all his fault!" And then he began to bellow loudly.

"You shut up, or I'll give you something to cry for," said Frank. "Now tell the whole thing, and tell it straight, too."

Thoroughly frightened, Billy told his story, excusing himself in every possible way. Mr. Yates listened closely and put a number of questions to the lad.

"It seems to me, Mr. Yates, the least you can do is to have these suits cleaned and dried for us," said Frank.

"I'll certainly have that done, boys—or you can have it done and I'll pay the bill. Take them to Kolish, the tailor, if you wish."

The matter was talked over, and in the meantime Sidney was sent up to his room. The boys allowed Billy Fram to go, but he was warned to keep his distance or they would make Lakeport too hot to hold him. He sneaked off like a whipped cur, and then the club members went off to hunt up the tailor, who did all sorts of odd jobs outside of making new clothes.

"I'll wager Sidney catches it," said Link, on the way, and he was right. Sidney received one of the hardest thrashings ever given to him, and his spending money was cut off for a month.

The tailor when roused up said he would go to work that very night on the uniforms and do his best with them. Frank remained two hours to help him, and as a consequence by nine o'clock the

next morning the suits were washed, dried and pressed, and looked almost as good as new. The bill amounted to eight dollars, and this Mr. Yates paid without a murmur.

The boys had arranged to go to Brookside in a big stage, and it was a jolly crowd of twenty-six that occupied the turnout. Another stage followed and also several carriages, while a number of folks went up to Brookside by the lake steamer and in naphtha launches.

When they arrived at Brookside they were escorted to the baseball grounds by the members of the rival club, who did all in their power to make our young friends comfortable.

"They believe in treating us better than the Excelsiors did," was Harry's comment. "I guess we are going to have a good game."

"They certainly look to be in the best of condition," answered Fred. "That Roy Willetts has a splendid arm for pitching."

George Dixon was the captain of the club and he played shortstop. He was a curly-headed fellow and full of fun.

"Sorry, Joe, but this is the day you are not to get a run," said he, coming up on the field.

"Don't be so sure about that, George," answered Joe. "It would be a poor score if it read 0 to 0."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean it's a sure thing that you won't get a run. I'm not so certain of my own club."

"Oh, come off!" George Dixon began to laugh. "Well, I hope we have a good square game all around, don't you?"

"I certainly do."

At the last minute Walter Bannister had been unable to play on the nine and Augustus De Vere was put in his place.

"I don't like the substitution," said Link to Bart.

"Neither do I, but I suppose Joe feels he ought to give Gus a chance. He's always blowing about what he can do."

"I'd rather have Teddy Dugan in the place."

"So would I, or even Lanky Suttervane."

Practice was soon over, and the umpire went out

into the field. The toss-up gave Lakeport the choice of innings and they sent Brookside to the bat. Then the umpire called out, "Play ball!" and the contest was begun.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GAME AT BROOKSIDE.

Contrary to expectations, both sides failed to score in the first and second innings of the game. Brookside got a man to second and Lakeport two men to first, but that was all. Each pitcher sent two batters out on strikes.

"This is certainly going to be a close game," said more than one. "The nines are very evenly matched."

When the Brooksides came to the bat in the third inning the second player up made a safe base hit. This was followed by a sacrifice hit which took the runner to second. Then came another base hit.

This was more interesting than before, and the crowd watched the next batter take his position

with interest. He was a long hitter and knowing this Joe motioned to the fielders back of him to be on the lookout for a big drive.

"One ball!" cried the umpire as the first ball was pitched. And this was followed by a strike.

"Run on anything," cautioned the coach to the two men on bases. "Two out."

Again the ball came in. It was swiftly delivered by Joe, but by good luck the Brookside player struck it squarely and sent it high up in the air towards leftfield.

"Run! run!" shouted a hundred voices. "Run!" And the batter, as well as those on the bases, started to run with might and main.

"Catch it, De Vere!" came the cry from the Lakeport supporters.

"It's an easy fly!"

"Those runs won't count!"

The ball was well up in the air and almost directly over Augustus De Vere's head. But strange to say the dudish player ran first backward and then forward and then skipped from side to side.

"Don't miss that, Gus!" yelled Joe. "It's your ball and it's easy, old man!"

"He's going to miss it as sure as fate!" groaned Harry.

"Oh, he can't miss that," came from another player.

One runner was already home and the others were well on the way when the ball came within a foot of Augustus De Vere's hands. He put up one hand feebly, stared hard at the sphere, and then let it roll behind him on the ground.

"He's dropped it!"

"Come in! Come in! You've got dead loads of time!"

"Get the ball!" screamed Joe and some others. "Throw up the ball!" And now Paul Shale ran toward the spot where the ball lay. De Vere turned around, stared blankly in one direction and another, and fell flat upon the ball and rolled over. Then Paul Shale came up, snatched the leather sphere from the grass and sent it to the home plate with unerring accuracy. But it was too late —the three runs were in.

"Oh, what baby play!"

"That gives Brookside three runs!"

"Hullo, butter-fingers! You had better go home to your mammy!"

"Give him a crab-net to catch with!"

"He did it on purpose! Send him off the field!"

By this time Joe was approaching Augustus De Vere.

"Why didn't you hang on to that ball, Gus?" he demanded.

"I—er—I—it slipped before I knew it!" stammered the dudish youth.

"It was the easiest kind of a fly to catch."

"Was it?"

"Certainly it was. You were going to do such big things, and here you go and get badly rattled the first thing!" continued Joe, bitterly.

"Humph! if that's the way you're going to talk I won't play any more!" grumbled Augustus De Vere. "You pitched the ball and let him hit it!"

"I don't deny that, but you ought to have made more of an effort to catch it than you did."

"Put him off! Put him off!" came in a chorus from the side of the field.

"I—I guess I won't play any more," said Augustus. "The sun makes my head ache." And he turned and hurried for the bench. A minute later he disappeared and that was the last seen of him during that game.

"Teddy, go down and cover leftfield," said Joe. "And don't you drop any flies."

"Not on yer necktie!" cried the Irish lad. "If I do, you can duck me in the lake be the heels fer it!" And off he scampered, his freckled face on a broad grin.

The rest of the inning was short, the next player going out on a pop fly to third. Then the Lakeports came in, to try their luck again and talk over De Vere's error.

"I always said he was a stick," grumbled Matt. "A stick and a gas bag combined."

"Perhaps he thought the ball too dirty to hold," suggested Bart, with a grin. "He loves to keep his hands lily white."

No more runs were scored until the sixth inning,

when Brookside added one more to its total. Lakeport also scored twice, much to the satisfaction of its supporters.

The seventh inning was also a blank for each side. Then came the eighth which left the score Brookside 7, Lakeport 4. One of the runs put down for the latter team was made by Teddy Dugan and of this the little Irish lad was wonderfully proud.

"Good for you, Teddy!" cried Joe, slapping him on the back. "I am sorry now I didn't put you on the nine in the first place."

"We've got to do some tall hustling, to beat that lead," said Fred, with a doubtful shake of his head.

"It looks like we were up against it good and hard, don't it?" came from Link. "Well, we must expect to be beaten sometimes."

"We are not beaten yet," added Matt, determinedly.

By good pitching Joe managed to put the Brookside players out in one-two-three order in the ninth inning. When this was over he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Thank fortune, they can't get any more runs!" he said to his brother.

The batting order was the same as when they had played the Excelsiors and Fred was the first player up in the ninth inning.

"Now, Fred, do something!" pleaded Joe. "Don't let them down us too easily."

The first ball pitched was a good one and Fred drove it down to center. He flew rather than ran to first.

"Good!" cried Joe, and ran down to coach him. "Now, make second if you can!"

Matt next came to the bat, and knocked a safe hit to rightfield. Up came the ball to second, but it was too high and passed over the base player's head. The pitcher of the Brooksides caught it, but by that time Fred was safe on second and Matt safe on first.

"That's the way to do it!" sang out Joe. "Keep the ball rolling, boys! We've got 'em on the run!"

Frank was next to the bat, and with two strikes on him knocked a short ball into centerfield. The

second baseman went after it and likewise the fielder and as a consequence both bumped together and neither got the ball. Seeing this, Fred, who had already reached third, tore up to home, while Matt leaped and slid down to second. Frank, of course, got to first with ease.

"Hurrah! one run in and two men on base!"

"And nobody out!"

It was now Harry's turn to bat. Evidently the pitcher of the rival nine was worried, for he soon had two balls called on him. Then Harry let another go and it was called a strike. The next ball was all right and Harry banged it down to shortstop. It was a fatal spot, for the rival player picked it up and put Matt out at third. Then he threw it to second, but Frank was declared safe by the umpire on a somewhat close decision.

"Joe Westmore to the bat, Link Darrow on deck!" sang out the scorer, and Joe came up and took his position beside the home plate. The ball came in so close to him that he would have been struck had he not leaped back. The catcher let it

pass him, and up came Frank to third, while Harry ran down to second.

"That's the way to do it!" cried one of the Lakeport boys. "Keep the ball rolling."

Joe watched his opportunity and with one strike on him, hit a safe one to leftfield. This took him to first and brought Frank home.

"Another run for Lakeport!"

"One run more and the score will be a tie!"

"Now, Lakeport, do your best!"

Harry was now on third and Link was at the bat. The latter tried to "line the leather out," but failed and sent the ball halfway down to the pitcher. Off he sprinted for first while Harry flew towards home. The ball came in, but it was too late. Harry was safe.

"A tie! A tie! Seven to seven!"

"Now, Lakeport, bring in the winning run?"

"Don't you let them do it, Brookside."

The excitement was now at a fever heat and the majority of the spectators were standing up and crowding forward.

Paul Shale now came forward. He knocked two

fouls and then sent up a pop fly which the pitcher gathered in with ease.

"Too bad!"

"One more chance, Lakeport. Now see what you can do!"

Teddy was already in position, with a grim look of determination on his freckled face. With all the strength of his arms he struck at the sphere and it went high up in the air, in the direction of first base.

"Run!" was the yell. "Run!" But running was useless, the baseman got the ball; and the inning came to a finish. Score, Brookside 7, Lakeport 7.

"They have got to play another inning!"

It was quickly begun and as quickly finished, neither side scoring.

"We will play one more inning," announced the umpire. "It is getting too dark to play more."

"I'm satisfied," said Joe.

"So am I," added George Dixon.

The Brooksides were soon to the bat. One man managed to get to second, but that was all.

"Now, Lakeport, is your last chance!"

The first player to the bat went out on a foul. The second got to first and then to third. But the next man was struck out, and a short fly followed which was gathered in by the second baseman of the Brooksides.

"All over!" announced the umpire.

"Seven to seven! Eleven innings and a tie!"

"Boys, that was a swell game, wasn't it?"

"Best game I ever saw in my life!"

So the comments ran on, while the rival players gathered together and shook hands.

"We'll have to play another game some day," said George Dixon to Joe.

"All right, I'm willing," answered the captain of the Lakeports.

CHAPTER XX.

HARE AND HOUNDS.

Of course my young readers cannot expect me to relate all the particulars of all the games of ball the members of the Lakeport Club played that season. During the following week they met a nine from the village of Racine and won the game by a score of 9 to 6, and later met a club from Jackson Flats and won by a score of 18 to 12. They also had a match with some big boys from Haven Center and suffered defeat by a score of 11 to 8.

"Those fellows were too big for us," said Harry.

"Yes, and I am certain one or two were professionals," added Link. "We had better leave them alone after this," and they did.

At the village of Camdale, when they went to play the local nine, they had rather a trying experience. They won the game by the close score of

8 to 9, and the Camdale Club refused to consider themselves beaten.

"It was your own umpire," said Joe to the Camdale captain. "The game is ours and we want our rightful share of the gate receipts."

"Two of the runs you got didn't count!" struck in the Camdale first baseman, a fellow who looked like a perfect bruiser.

"I say they did count, and the umpire says so too," declared Joe, bravely. "We want our money."

One word brought on another, and at last several of the Camdale players, backed up by some town roughs, began to show fight. Blows were given and taken freely, but in the end the Camdale fellows were forced to retreat. Then Joe threatened two of the crowd with arrest; and in the end the Lakeport nine received what was justly due them and marched off in triumph.

"I don't want to play that gang again," said Fred in disgust.

"They aren't fit for any club to play with," came from Harry.

"After this we shall have to be more particular about our challenges," added Joe. "Before we send a challenge or accept one we must find out if the rival club is made up of decent fellows."

Following his one appearance on the ball field Augustus De Vere sent in his resignation as a member of the club and it was promptly accepted.

"I really don't care for the game, don't you know," drawled Augustus, when speaking of it later. "It's a rude pastime at the best. I'd rather take a stroll, don't you know, or play pool."

"Well, everybody to his taste," answered Joe, briefly.

"You didn't win that game anyhow," said the dudish young man, maliciously.

"No, but we tied the score and that was something."

"Humph! I don't wish to play a game if I can't win or lose," said Augustus, and with this unsatisfactory answer he walked off.

Though the boys thought a great deal of baseball, they did not neglect other sports, and one day a grand game of hare and hounds was instituted.

The hares were Harry and Link, while Bart was made the chief of the hounds. Each of the hares carried several bags of clipped slips of paper and also a lunch, and the hounds were likewise provided with something to eat.

"We shall give you exactly fifteen minutes in which to get away in," declared Bart to the hares. "At exactly twelve o'clock, no matter where you are, you must stop for one hour in which to rest and eat your lunch."

"And you must do the same," said Harry; and so it was agreed. It was likewise agreed that the run should be planned to last from nine in the morning until four or five o'clock in the afternoon.

The day for the game opened brightly and by quarter to nine the hares and hounds assembled at the starting point, which was the public square of Lakeport. A gentleman was there to act as starter, and promptly on the stroke of nine he sent the hares off and at exactly quarter after nine the hounds followed on the trail.

"Now, Harry, we have got to hump ourselves," declared Link, as they struck off down the street

and turned the first corner. "Don't forget that some of those other chaps can run better than we can."

"I'm willing to hump as much as I can, Link, but we don't want to tire ourselves out the very first thing," declared Harry.

They had already settled on the first two miles of their run, and this took them out of Lakeport and along the lake for a distance of a mile and then up a hill leading to what was known as Dudley's Pastures. From the pastures they crossed a small creek, and then struck up another hill, leading to Bramberry's Woods.

"They have started after us," cried Harry, consulting his watch.

"Well, we've got a pretty stiff lead," answered his fellow hare. "All we have got to do is to keep it."

"Do you know the way through the woods? I don't."

"I think I know it," answered Harry.

They were soon plowing their way through the undergrowth. They had another stream of water

to cross, and once on the other side Link let out a sudden scream:

"A snake! Look out!"

"Is it a rattler?" queried Harry in alarm.

"No, I don't think it is."

The snake was curled up in the sun, on a fallen log. It raised its ugly head at them, then whipped around and glided away among some rocks.

"Ugh! I don't like that!" came from Link.

"Nor I. Let us get out of the woods as quickly as we can."

"Do you think the snake will come after us?"

"No."

"We ought to have brought a gun or a pistol along."

"Well, we didn't. When we stop for a rest we can cut ourselves good heavy sticks."

In a short while after this the woods were left behind and they came out on a side road which was but little traveled.

"I know this road," declared Link. "It leads to Jerry Flagg's farm."

"You mean the man who owns the bull that broke loose in Lakeport?"

"Yes."

"We don't want to run across that bull," said Harry, decidedly. "I've had enough of that beast."

It was not long after this that they passed Jerry Flagg's house. The farmer was in his door-yard and stared at them in alarm.

"What's the matter o' ye, boys?" he called out.

"Nothing, Mr. Flagg," answered Link.

"What be ye a-runnin' for, then?"

"We are playing hare and hounds."

"Oh!"

"Where's that bull?" questioned Harry.

"Up in yonder field. Don't ye go nigh him, or ye may have trouble."

"Don't worry, we don't intend to go near him."

The boys ran on, and the farmhouse was soon lost to sight around a bend. Then the road grew rocky and hard to travel and they had to slow down.

"Which field did he mean?" said Harry. "The one on the left or the one on the right?"

"He pointed to the left."

"That is what I thought, but I wasn't sure. Well, I think we ought to take to the other field. Then we can get on the regular mountain road and go up to Lookout Point."

"Hurrah! that's the scheme!" cried Link. "Perhaps when we are at the Point we'll be able to spot the other fellows."

They leaped a stone fence and cut across a small pasture. Then came an orchard in which the trees were old and almost past bearing. But they picked up several apples, to eat later on.

"I've got to rest before a great while," declared Link. "I'm beginning to get a little pain in the side."

"Let us rest when we get to the regular mountain road. Then we can—Oh, Link, the bull!"

Harry was right. The bull was not over a hundred feet away, charging on them like a tornado.

There was no time to think of what to do. Both boys were close to the limbs of a crooked apple

tree. Up they went into the tree in a jiffy. The bull struck a small branch, but his horns did not reach them.

"Phew! what a close shave!" gasped Link, when he could speak. "Another second and he would have made mincemeat of both of us!"

"How are we going to get away from him?" was Harry's question, but his friend could not answer it.

Both looked down at the bull. The beast was pawing the ground savagely and swinging his tail from side to side. His eyes, full of anger, glared at them steadily.

"We are in a pickle," said Harry. "That bull may keep us here all day."

"Or until the other fellows come up. We'll have to shout a warning if we hear them."

"I've got a plan. Give me one of those matches you are carrying."

"What are you going to do?"

"See that dead branch over our heads? I'm going to break it off and set fire to it. They say almost all animals dread a fire."

Link soon had the branch down and then the match was struck and applied to a number of dried leaves. Soon the mass was blazing away gayly. Then Link held it down and flourished it at the bull.

The effect was all that they had desired. The savage beast gave one sniff at the flames and then with a bellow and a roar he tore across the orchard and the pasture, in the direction of Farmer Flagg's house.

"He has gone!" cried Harry. "He didn't like that for a cent!"

"We can't let the other fellows come in here," declared Link. "Let us go back to the road," and this they did and started a new trail, making it so thick that the others could not help but follow it.

Having lost some valuable time they started again at full speed. The road was very rocky, and once Harry pitched headlong, but picked himself up again instantly.

"Hurt?" queried his chum.

"No, but it didn't do my wind any good," was the reply.

At last they struck the regular mountain road and then their course was straight up the mountain.

"We'll get there about noon," declared Link. "And that will just suit me, for it will be a dandy place for resting."

Link was right, they found themselves close to the top of the mountain at just five minutes to the noon hour. They slowed up a bit, and just as Harry's watch pointed to twelve they came out on the Point.

"Hurrah! the first half of the chase is over!" cried Link.

"And they haven't caught us yet."

And then they sat down, to rest and to partake of the lunch they had brought along.

CHAPTER XXI.

STOPPED BY TRAMPS.

It was a beautiful sight from the top of Lookout Point and both boys enjoyed it very much. They secured a good place to rest, and did not attempt to eat anything until twenty minutes later.

"What a spot for a summer hotel," said Harry. "It's a wonder some capitalists haven't come up here."

"It's too far from the railroads, Harry. But some day you'll see a road in this vicinity, and then things will boom."

The boys had hoped to catch sight of the hounds, but try their best, they could not locate the others.

"They are in the shade somewhere," said Harry. "And I don't blame them, for this sun is rather hot."

They ate their lunch leisurely and washed it

down with water from a spring not far away. They also washed their faces and hands and this refreshed them not a little.

"Five minutes more and it will be time to start," declared Harry, as he consulted his watch for the fifth time. "Let us get all of our things together. We don't want to lose a minute."

"Not much! we start on the stroke of one!" cried Link, and did as suggested.

They had already mapped out the return trip, and when the hands of Harry's watch pointed to exactly one o'clock they set off, first at a walk and then almost on a run—across the top of the mountain and down the southern slope.

"I would like to know how close they are," said Link, a little later. "Do you think they have gained the top of the mountain yet?"

"We'll see when we come out at yonder opening."

The opening gained they looked back. Far up on the mountain they could make out a number of figures moving about. Soon the figures disappeared.

"They were the hounds, no doubt of it," declared Link. "Come, or they will catch us sure!" And they set off at a faster run than before.

The bottom of the mountain reached they traveled a fine highway for half a mile. Then they made a sharp turn to the left and went across a cornfield and into a patch of thin woods. They had just entered the woods when they came upon a campfire, around which were seated half a dozen dirty and disreputable looking tramps.

"Hi! wot do youse fellers want?" demanded one of the tramps, leaping to his feet, while several of the others did the same.

"None of your business!" cried Harry, and moved on, with Link beside him.

"Stop dem, Cully!" said another tramp. "They mean to give us away!"

"Hi, youse fellers stop!" roared the tramp who had first spoken, and he started to come after our young friends. Seeing this, three of the other tramps did the same.

"Don't let them catch you!" whispered Harry,

thinking of the trouble he and Joe had had with tramps the fall previous.

"Not if I can help it!" answered Link.

Side by side the boys ran on with the tramps after them. The latter did not relish the run, however, and presently one picked up a heavy stick and hurled it at Harry. It struck the lad in the back and made him pitch headlong.

As soon as Harry fell Link, not to desert his chum, stopped running and picked up a stone.

"Leave us alone!" he cried. "Do you hear? Leave us alone!"

"We ain't goin' ter hurt ye!" said the tramp who had hurled the stick.

"You had no business to knock my friend down."

"Well, why didn't yer stop when I told yer to?"

By this time Harry was scrambling to his feet. He was not much injured. All of the tramps lost no time in surrounding the boys.

"You hadn't any right to attack me," cried Harry, indignantly.

"You was going to tell on us, wasn't yer?" sneered another of the tramps.

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"Don't yer believe him, Gassy," broke in still another of the disreputable men. "They act innocent-like, but you can bet they are mighty sharp."

"Come on back to the fire an' talk it over," said the tramp who had caused Harry to fall.

"I don't want to go back."

"Neither do I," came from Link. "If you don't let us go we'll make trouble for you."

"An' yer wants to go so yer kin tell on us, don't yer?" came from the fellow called Gassy.

"I don't know what you mean?"

"Ah, go on wid yer! You're from dat farmhouse over dare an' I knows it," growled the tramp. "Yer wants to go back an' say we got der chickens. But yer ain't goin' back so easy, see?"

"Do you mean to say you are going to keep us here?" asked Harry.

"Dat's wot—fer de present. When we gits

ready ter move on den youse can go too—de udder way, see?''

The boys now realized at what the tramps were driving. They had stolen some chickens and they imagined the lads knew of this and wanted to bring somebody to the scene who could have them locked up. They wanted to hold the boys until they, the tramps, were ready to clear out for parts unknown.

''Don't youse make any fuss an' youse won't git hurted,'' said one of the gang. ''If youse do make a fuss——'' He ended by a shake of his fist.

''Let us go back to the campfire,'' declared Harry suddenly, and he gave Link a wink. ''We'll give these rascals all they want,'' he added, in a whisper.

Link at once understood, and they walked back to the fire slowly.

''Wot's in dat bag?'' questioned Gassy. ''Let me see it.''

He snatched one of the bags of paper from Link and gazed into it.

''Wot is it?'' asked another of the gang.

"Ain't nuttin in it but paper!" cried the other tramp, in disgust. "Say, wot does dis mean anyhow?"

Before any more could be said there was a cry from the road and half a dozen boys appeared, headed by Paul Shale and Fred. Then more boys came up, for the hounds numbered fully twenty.

"Stay right where you are," cried Harry to the tramps. "The one who tries to run away will get hurt."

"Say, look at de crowd!" gasped one of the tramps in alarm. "Dis is de time we got caught sure!"

"Hullo!" came from Paul. "Give it up, did you?"

"No, the tramps stopped us!" called out Link. "Surround them, fellows, and don't let one of them get away. They are nothing but chicken thieves!"

By this time all of the hounds had come up. Some carried sticks and the others took up stones and whatever they could find handy. The tramps were surrounded, and when Gassy tried to break

away he was promptly hurled back and given a crack on the head by Joe.

"I know your kind!" cried Joe. "I've met 'em before. Stay where you are!" And he flourished his stick in a threatening manner.

"Dis is all a mistake, gents!" whined one of the tramps. "We didn't mean no harm to yer friends. We was only foolin'."

"Tell that to the bullfrogs!" came from Harry. "They forced us to stay here. Look at the chickens and the chicken bones. They are assuredly thieves."

"I know the farmer who lives on the next farm," said one of the boys. "If you say so, I'll run over to his house and see if he has lost any chickens."

"Go ahead, and be quick about it," replied Joe.

The boy made off and another boy went with him. Fortunately the farmer was met near his barn, in company with two of his sons.

"Lost chickens?" he queried. "Jest guess I have, Bob. Lost three last night an' four the night before. What do you know about 'em?" And

when the boys had told their story the farmer lost no time in arming himself with a shotgun. His sons got good clubs, and then the whole party made its way to the tramps' camp.

When the rascals saw Farmer Loftus and his sturdy sons they wanted to run more than ever. But the presence of the shotgun and the clubs detained them and they submitted without a murmur.

"I'd a good mind to fill ye all full o' shot," said the farmer, indignantly. "Yes, those are my chickens, every one on 'em. I'm going to have the hull crowd locked up."

"I'll help you," said Harry.

"So will I," added Joe.

"Let us all go along," came from Fred. "The game is over."

So it was decided, and surrounded by the boys and the farmer and his sons, the tramps were marched off to the village of Compton, a mile and a half away. Here they were locked up, and later on sent to prison for their misdeeds.

"I'm glad ye collared them tramps," said the farmer, after the excitement was over. "They

have been a-botherin' me for a long time." And then he invited the whole crowd to his house, to partake of doughnuts, pie, and milk, and he also gave each some apples on parting.

"Not such a bad game of hare and hounds after all," said Harry, on the way home.

"You're right," answered Link. "But it didn't wind up exactly as we expected."

CHAPTER XXII.

A GAME AND A PLOT.

The second game with the Excelsiors, for the championship of Lakeport, was now close at hand, and for several days the boys of the town talked of nothing else. As before, opinions were about evenly divided as to which club would win.

In place of Sidney Yates, Si Voup had obtained a player of more than ordinary excellence, a boy named Kyle Fenton, who had lately moved to Lakeport. Kyle was a fine batter and a splendid runner and Voup counted on him to help the score a great deal.

The game brought forth a crowd fully equal to that which had witnessed the first contest. As previously agreed, it was played on the Lakeports' grounds and our young friends did all they could to make the spot attractive. They had erected a

flagpole and from this Old Glory flapped bravely to the breeze, and the grand stand was likewise decorated with flags.

The umpire on this occasion was an old player named Cameron. Although Joe and his fellow members did not know it, Cameron was a personal friend to Mr. Voup and bent on favoring Si and his club all he could. This was a handicap which cost the Lakeports dearly.

The first two innings of the game were quickly over, with the score 1 to 0, in favor of the Excelsiors. The third inning brought a "goose egg" for each club and the next inning did likewise.

"This is certainly a close game," said more than one.

"Looks now as if the Lakeports were going to be whitewashed."

"Well, the game is young yet."

As sometimes happens, things "broke loose" in the fifth and sixth innings and the latter left the score, Excelsiors 6, Lakeports 4. In the sixth inning Paul Shale scored a home run and Joe a three-base hit, both of which performances

brought forth a wild storm of applause. In this inning the Excelsiors were given two runs by such a close decision that Joe at once entered a protest and was backed up by Link, Fred and some others.

"I don't want to listen!" growled the umpire.

"I do not consider those runs fair," said Joe. "One man cut third base and the other did not touch the plate."

"It was all right," returned Cameron, stubbornly.

"If we have any more such work I shall either call for another umpire or throw up the game," said Joe sharply. The decision was so unpopular that the umpire was roundly hissed, while a few yelled to "Throw him out!"

In the seventh inning Kyle Fenton made a home run and this was all the scoring that was done up to the beginning of the ninth. The score board now read: Excelsiors 7, Lakeports 4.

"This looks bad," said Fred, as the club went to the bat, "we have got to make three runs to tie the score."

The first boy to the bat went out on a foul. The

second, however, made a safe hit to first, and this was followed by a "two-bagger" which brought in one run. Then came another streak of luck, and when the first half of the inning ended the score was tied.

"Now to shut them out," said more than one member of the Lakeports.

"I shall certainly do my best," returned Joe.

He pitched with extreme care, but Cameron was still favoring the other nine and called several pitches balls when they should have been strikes.

"That was a strike!" cried Joe finally.

"It was a ball—too high," growled the umpire.

"A strike! A strike!" yelled the crowd.

"Put the umpire off the field!"

"He has been favoring the Excelsiors right along!"

There was a sudden rush, and fearful of attack Cameron began to sneak from the field. But Joe waved the crowd of angry boys back.

"Don't touch him," he said loudly. "We can handle this case."

"Well, stand up for your rights," came from a

man in the crowd. "Make them put in a new umpire."

Si Voup wanted to defend Cameron, but he saw that it would be useless to attempt to do so. Nearly everybody was calling for his removal.

"I'll give it up!" called out Cameron. "Get another umpire. I'm sick of it!" And he ran rather than walked from the field.

Another umpire was quickly chosen—a fellow known to be strictly fair. Then the game went on and soon two players were out. But a runner had got to third and the next boy to the bat was Kyle Fenton. Kyle watched his chances and getting a ball about right rapped it smartly to centerfield. This brought in the runner from third; and the game went to the Excelsiors by a score of 8 to 7.

As soon as the last run came in the Excelsiors and their friends went wild with excitement. But the general public took the result coldly, for many felt that the game had not been fairly umpired by Cameron.

'The score should really be, Lakeports 7, Ex-

celsiors 6," said Mr. Monroe Corsen. "The umpiring was simply outrageous."

"Wait till we play the third of the series," answered Joe. "I'll warrant that we'll have a fair and square umpire; somebody we know we can trust."

Of course the Excelsiors insisted upon it that the game had been fairly played. The only "kicker" was Kyle Fenton, the new member, who shortly afterwards sent in his resignation.

"That crowd makes me sick," he declared to Harry. "When I play ball I want to do it on the level."

"They have to thank you for two runs made," replied Harry.

"Humph! if I had known the sort of fellows they are I should never have joined them."

Kyle wanted to join the Lakeports and was finally put on the list of substitutes. As a substitute he played half a dozen games, and helped the club along a great deal.

"But I can't let you play when we have that final game with the Excelsiors," said Joe. "If I

did and we happen to win, they would throw it up to us that we had stolen one of their players."

"All right, I understand your position," came from Kyle. "Just the same, I should like to play against them and give them a good drubbing."

The summer was now moving along swiftly. Each of the boys had more or less work to do, and one week Joe and Harry had to help at the store, their father being sick. During that time Fred took charge of the club and played a game at a place called Ravenwood, winning by the remarkable score of 22 to 11.

"I see you literally doubled up on the Ravenwoods," said Joe, when he heard the news. "Kind of a two-for-one arrangement. I'm glad to hear it."

"Those Ravenwood players were all good at the game," said Fred. "But the team work was miserable—hardly one player supported another."

"That proves what I have often said, Fred. It's the team work that counts. I think Si Voup has some good players, but just when you think

they are going to get together and do something big they go to pieces."

"Si is bragging that he will surely win that third game," came from Link, who chanced to be present.

"Maybe he'll want the umpire to win it for him," put in Matt. "We don't want to play against ten men again."

There was a good deal of wrangling over the question of an umpire. Voup wanted one man and Joe wanted another. At last the matter was left to several well-known gentlemen and they procured a man from the city named Cabot, who had often umpired at college games. Cabot was the soul of honor and knew every rule and every trick of the game by heart.

During the summer Si Voup and several of his cohorts had grown remarkably sporty. They attended a number of horse races and frequently made bets on the results. Whenever he could get away from the mill Sidney Yates went with the crowd.

At one of these race meetings Voup ran across

Dan Marcy. For a long time Marcy had kept away from Lakeport, fearful that he might be arrested for the stealing of the *Sprite*. To those whom he met he indignantly denied that he had had anything to do with the taking of the sloop.

"I'll go down to Lakeport and show 'em some day that I am honest and that they can't blacken my character in this manner," he growled.

He had seen Joe, Fred and Bart on the day that the boys discovered the sloop hidden in the creek, and he felt certain that the three boys were responsible for the report circulated about him. It may be added here that he was guilty, but he intended to do his best to squirm out of it.

"Betting on the races, eh?" said Si Voup to Marcy when they met.

"Oh, a little. I just won ten dollars."

"You are in luck. I just dropped five."

"Let me give you a tip," went on Dan Marcy. He knew Si well and knew exactly how to handle the youth. The "tip" was accepted, and by luck Si won two dollars on it. This made the pair more friendly than ever and quite a conversation en-

sued, regarding affairs at Lakeport, and the doings of the two baseball clubs.

"You could win a lot of money on that next baseball game if you wanted to," said Dan Marcy.

"How?"

"By betting on your club and then winning. Now don't think I said that for a joke. I mean, make it a dead sure thing that you will win."

"Yes, but how can we make it a dead sure thing?" questioned Si, with interest.

"Oh, there are several ways to do that."

"I'd like to know just one way."

"I'd let you into the secret if I felt sure I could trust you," went on Dan Marcy, in a lower tone.

Si Voup stared at him for a moment. He understood what sort of a character the former bully of Lakeport was, and felt that the secret must be of a shady nature. Yet he was anxious to win, and the prospect of making money by it appealed to him strongly.

"You can trust me, Dan. I never blab things I hear."

"Over to Springfield the Rocket Club once won

a game by doctoring the drinking water the other club used. The stuff in the water made the players dizzy so they couldn't catch the ball for a cent."

"What did they put into the water?"

"I don't know. But I guess a druggist could tell you."

"I shouldn't care to try it. In the first place it would be hard to get at the water they use and in the second place a fellow might run the risk of poisoning one of them," went on Si, who was a coward at heart.

"Well, there's another plan, a good deal better," went on Dan Marcy. "If you mean business, I'll go into it with you."

"Then let me hear the plan," answered Si. "I certainly want to win that game, if not in one way then in another."

Half an hour later Dan Marcy had unfolded his plot in all of its details. It pleased Si Voup and he agreed to take it under consideration and let the former bully of Lakeport know what he would do about it in a few days.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE KIDNAPPING OF JOE AND FRED.

As the days went by Joe kept his club practicing constantly. He also pitched a great deal, so that his arm might be in perfect condition when the game with their rivals should come off. He had a new drop curve which he trusted would prove effective in deceiving the Excelsior batters.

Si Voup had sent several written communications to the Lakeports. One was that the game should take place on a certain Saturday, beginning at exactly three o'clock, and that there should be no postponement unless it rained heavily.

"I don't see why he sent that," said Fred. "We understood it that way all along."

"Oh, he wants to appear officious!" grumbled Frank. "Tell him we'll be there on the minute,

and we'll play in any kind of weather he wants," and this was done.

A day or two later Link came into the clubroom and announced that Voup was making some heavy bets on the Excelsiors.

"I don't know where he is getting the money," said he, "but he has got it and he doesn't seem to be afraid to risk it, either."

"Well, I shan't bet," answered Joe. "I don't believe in it."

That Si Voup was betting was true. Some of the money was his own and some he borrowed from his friends. Several cautioned him about what he was doing, but he only smiled quietly and went on as before. Then several of the other club members began to bet also, until, all told, the crowd had quite a sum at stake.

"They must think they are going to have a walk-over," said Fred. "What can it mean, Harry?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Perhaps he has taken in some professional players on the sly," came from Matt.

"We'll write to him for his list of players," said

Joe, and this was done. The list came the next day, showing that but one change had been made, in consequence of Kyle Fenton's resignation. Then Si demanded the list of Lakeport players and this was likewise forwarded.

"This is going to be the hottest game ever played in this vicinity," said Harry. "The Excelsiors are out for blood."

"Well, we'll give them as hard a rub as we can," answered Joe.

On Friday, the day before the game was to come off, Fred told Joe that he had an errand to do up the lake shore, at a place called Hollow Cove.

"I'd like first-rate to have you come along," he added.

"All right; I'll see if I can get off," returned Joe. "When are you coming back?"

"Not until this evening," answered Fred.

Permission to go was readily obtained, and the chums set off about ten o'clock in the morning. They were to obtain their dinners at a farmhouse on the way.

"We might have gone on our bicycles," said

Fred, as they walked along. "But mine is out of repair."

"And I need a new front tire," came from Joe. "Oh, I'd just as soon walk," he added. "I've got tired of wheeling."

"Everything is baseball nowadays," laughed Fred. "By the way, have you noticed how Si Voup and some of those other fellows keep watching us all the time?"

"Yes, I have noticed that, Fred. They seem to be afraid we'll play some sort of a trick on them."

"Perhaps they are up to some trick themselves."

"Well, I am going to keep my eyes wide open the minute I get on the ball field. I am sure we can trust that new umpire and as for the rest, why we have got to look out for ourselves, that's all."

"Right you are."

"I don't know much about that new player Voup has in Kyle's place, but to me he doesn't seem any great shakes."

"He may be playing foxy."

"That's true, but when I saw him practicing he appeared to be doing his best."

So the talk ran on as the two boys journeyed along. It was a fairly clear day with just a few clouds floating across the sky.

Coming to a large apple orchard they halted long enough to get a number of apples. At the orchard the road took a sharp turn in the direction of the lake. Just as they made this turn they beheld several persons running across the opposite end of the orchard.

"Hullo!" cried Joe. "What are those fellows up to?"

"I give it up," answered Fred. "Maybe they were stealing apples and thought we were after them."

"They were certainly in a tremendous hurry."

They looked into the orchard, but could see nothing further of the strangers. Then they moved on until they came to a spot where the road ran close to the lake shore. It was rather wild and lonely, no farmhouse being within half a mile.

The two boys were suspecting no attack, and

when they were suddenly seized from behind they were taken completely by surprise. Each was thrown forward in the grass beside the road, and somebody came down on them with such force that the wind of each was knocked completely out of him.

"The ropes, quick!" said a low, rough voice, and before they could do a thing their hands were bound tightly behind them.

"Wha—what does this mean?" gasped Fred, trying to squirm from under the party who held him down.

"Shut up!" came the command. "If you don't, you'll get a crack over the head!"

The voice was rough and unnatural, as if the speaker was trying to conceal his identity.

"You'll pay for this!" came from Joe. He was wondering if the assailants belonged to the gang of tramps that had been rounded up during the game of hare and hounds.

At last the boys were allowed to stand up, and much to their astonishment they found themselves confronted by a party of three men or boys, which

they could not tell. Each of the three had a big, black cloth over his head, tied with a string around his neck and with two holes in front, so that the wearer could see. All were armed with clubs.

"Is this a trick, or what?" demanded Joe, after a pause.

"Shut up!" came in reply, and the speaker brandished his club in such a savage fashion that Joe felt compelled to step back.

Against their will the two prisoners were marched along the road to where a path led still further up the lake shore. They were forced to walk along this path until they reached a perfect wilderness bordering the lake. Then one of the masked fellows went off, leaving the other two to remain on guard.

"What do you make of this?" asked Fred, in a low tone.

"I don't know what to make of it," answered Joe, in a whisper. "I hardly think they are tramps."

"I think I have heard their voices before."

"Will you keep still?" roared one of the captors, and he hit each a light blow with his club.

"What are you going to do with us?" asked Joe, as bravely as he could.

This question was not answered, and for half an hour the two boys were compelled to stand where they were, without saying a word to each other. At the end of that time a low whistle came from up the lake, which one of the masked fellows immediately answered.

"Now move on!" he commanded, and the whole party pushed through the brushwood to the water's edge. Here a sloop was in waiting, with the other masked person in command.

"Get on board, and be quick about it," was the next order received. And when the two lads hesitated they were pushed in such a fashion that each came near going into the lake. Seeing there was no help for it, and that they would be roundly abused if they attempted to thwart the plans of their captors, they boarded the sloop. The mainsail was at once hoisted, and the sloop stood up the lake.

The fellow who had brought the sloop in evidently knew how to handle such a craft and soon the boat was making the best possible use of the wind. The course was directly towards Pine Island, and Joe and Fred rightfully guessed that they were bound for that location.

As soon as the craft got within a reasonable distance of the island those with masks became extremely cautious, and they did not attempt to make a landing until they were certain nobody was near. Then the sloop was run into a cove, and the prisoners were forced to go ashore without delay.

"Now march!" was the next order issued to them.

"Where to?" questioned Joe.

"Straight ahead."

Again it was useless to resist, and they marched on. Each felt like fighting, but with his hands bound tightly behind him could do nothing.

Around to one side of the hill in the middle of the island was a short but rather deep gully, which during the winter had been completely filled with snow. To this gully one of the masked fellows led

"Now, march!"

the way, the others urging Fred and Joe along with their clubs and with switches they had cut.

Half way into the gully was a somewhat circular opening, having a large overhanging rock at the top. Here, beside the big rock, were a number of long and tough tree roots and some bushes.

"Tie them to the tree roots," said the leader of the crowd, and despite their protests Joe and Fred were made close prisoners without delay. Then the three masked fellows withdrew out of hearing for a consultation among themselves.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON PINE ISLAND AGAIN.

"Joe, what do you think this means?" asked Fred, as soon as the three masked persons were out of hearing.

"It's a riddle to me, Fred. One thing is certain, they mean to keep us prisoners."

"It doesn't look as if they did it in order to rob us," went on the stout youth.

"I've been studying the thing over and I rather think the big fellow of the crowd is Dan Marcy."

"I thought his voice sounded something like Marcy's myself. What of the others?"

"I've been thinking one might be Si Voup. But he disguises his voice pretty well—if it is Voup."

"Julius Cæsar!" cried Fred. "I wonder if such a thing could be possible? What a plan to trip us up!"

"What are you talking about?"

"If one of that crowd is Si Voup it is more than likely they kidnapped us so that we wouldn't be able to play that game of ball to-morrow."

At this statement the captain of the Lakeports grew more interested than ever.

"I wonder if they really would resort to such a trick," he mused. "It hardly seems possible. There isn't enough in it."

"I don't know about that. Remember, Si and his friends have been betting pretty heavily on the result."

"That is true, and come to think of it he was very particular to have it understood that the game must come off exactly at the appointed time."

"It's a contemptible trick!" sniffed Fred. "When they come back I am going to give them a piece of my mind."

"No, don't do that, for it may only get us into worse trouble. Act as if you thought they were tramps. That will throw them more off their guard than ever."

"If it's one of Si Voup's tricks he must have hired Dan Marcy to help him."

"I guess Marcy was only too willing to help—to get square for what we have done in the past against him. Another thing, Marcy may have money on the game, too. I've heard that he often bets at race tracks and other places."

By this time the three masked fellows were coming back and Joe and Fred changed the subject.

"I suppose you brought us here to rob us," said Joe, boldly. "Well, you won't get much out of me, for I haven't much with me."

"I've got forty cents and a broken watch with me," declared Fred.

"We ain't going to rob you, so you needn't git scared," said the big fellow of the party.

"I suppose you brought us here for our health," said Fred, sarcastically. "Very kind of you, I must say."

"If you talk like that, I'll switch you!" came from one of the others.

None of the masked fellows would say more. They busied themselves with making the bonds

which tied the boys to the tree roots more secure.

"Now we are going off for a little while," said the big fellow.

"Going to leave us here alone?" queried Joe.

"For awhile, yes."

"It isn't fair. Supposing some wild animal comes this way?"

"We won't be far off, and no animal is coming to hurt you, so you needn't get scared."

With this remark, the masked fellows withdrew again, and Joe and Fred heard them leave the gully altogether.

"It was Marcy as sure as fate!" declared Joe when they were alone.

"Yes, and I am pretty sure one of the others was Si Voup. But the third fellow stumps me."

"Perhaps it is the new player Si got in Kyle Fenton's place—the chap named Ike Boardman."

"Come to think of it, the voice did sound like Boardman's."

The time passed slowly, and as noon drew near both of the boys began to feel hungry. They tried

to loosen their bonds, but the cords only cut deeper into their flesh.

"Perhaps we are to be starved out," said Fred.

It was not until two o'clock that the tallest of the masked fellows came back, carrying a tin pail and a small square basket. In the basket he had some sandwiches, crackers and cheese, and in the pail some drinking water.

"Can't give you any course dinner," he said, roughly. "But I reckon it's about as good as you deserve."

Putting down his pail and basket, he untied one hand of each boy, so that he might help himself. The meal was a scant one, but everything tasted good and they ate with a relish.

"How long do you expect us to remain standing up?" asked Fred, who was growing tired.

"I'll 'tend to that, don't worry. Here, if you want some water now is your chance for a drink. You can each have a cupful."

Both were thirsty and each took the cupful of water readily.

"Let me have some more, please?" pleaded Fred.

"Not now. It's too much bother to bring the stuff such a distance. You can have another cupful at supper time," was the short answer.

As it was useless to argue, the two prisoners did not attempt to do so. They waited to see what would be the next movement of their masked captor. They saw him withdraw to a distance, and presently begin to smoke a pipe through a small hole in the head covering he still wore.

"Say, I'm getting sleepy," declared Fred, quarter of an hour later.

"Well, I'm sleepy myself," answered Joe. He gave a long yawn. "It seems to be coming on me all at once."

"That's the way with me." Fred also yawned. "Oh, dear, this is fierce! Wonder what makes it?"

In ten minutes more both of the boys found it impossible to keep their eyes open. They stretched themselves and shook their heads, but all to no purpose.

"Fred, I believe we have been drugged!" murmured Joe at last.

"Drugged?"

"Yes. There was something in the eating or in that drinking water meant to put us to sleep."

"The ras—rascals!" Fred yawned again. "I never—never—thought that any—anybody——" And then his eyes closed and he sank into a stupor. A moment later Joe went to sleep likewise, breathing heavily and with his head hanging on his breast.

"Thought that would do the work," said the masked fellow to himself. "Now it will be dead easy to keep them here until to-morrow night."

He approached both boys and examined each, to make certain that he was not shamming. Then he cut their bonds and allowed them to slip down on the ground. This done he hurried away, to return half an hour later with several blankets.

"I'll have to watch 'em until morning, I reckon," the masked fellow told himself. "Then, if they are still asleep, they can look after them-

selves." Thus musing, he placed them on one blanket and covered them with the other.

When Joe awoke it was with a dull feeling in his head which was far from pleasant. He had been dreaming that he was far underground and that all sorts of things were pressing upon him and that he could not throw them off. His mouth was parched and his eyeballs ached as they had never ached before.

"Oh, dear!" he murmured. "Oh, dear!" And then he tried to sit up, only to fall back again. "Harry!" He fancied he might be at home in bed with his brother beside him.

There was no answer to his call, and some minutes later he sat up again. This time he opened his eyes long enough to stare around him. He was on the ground, with a blanket partly over and partly under him. The place was new to him, showing that he had been moved while he slept.

"Where in the world am I?" was the next question he asked himself. "Where am I, and how did I get here?"

It was a good half hour before he could collect his scattered senses, and then he remembered how he had gone to sleep in the gully. He was now in the midst of some brushwood and a clump of tall pines. His ankles were bound together and his hands were crossed in front of him and also secured.

"Fred!" he called out. "Fred! Where are you?"

There was no answer, and now with an effort he struggled to his feet. But he was still too dizzy to stand and he had to hold on to the bushes for support.

"Fred must be somewheres around," he reasoned. "Unless they carried him off and left me here all alone. Oh, my head!" And then he sat down again.

But fortunately the weakness and dizziness did not last, and inside of half an hour his brain was as clear as ever. He gazed thoughtfully at the rope which bound his hands together in front of him. Then he began to chew on the rope with his teeth and finally got it loose. To liberate his ankles was

his next move, and then he cut himself a heavy stick with his jackknife.

"Now let those chaps come near me again and I'll give them something they won't relish," he told himself.

For some time he did not know which way to turn. He noticed that the sun was fairly high in the heavens and he wondered what time it could be. His watch had stopped.

"I'd like to know if it is Friday afternoon or Saturday morning," he muttered. "What a situation to be in! How am I to get back to Lakeport? I'll never be able to get back in time to play that game!" And the latter thought made him fairly groan.

CHAPTER XXV.

TRYING TO GET HOME.

Not far from where he had been resting Joe found a small watercourse, where he obtained a much-needed drink. By following the watercourse for a distance of half a dozen rods he came in sight of the lake, at a point near the southern extremity of Pine Island.

"Well, I've located myself," he told himself, "and that is something. I wonder if Fred can be anywhere around?"

Knowing where he was, he was now able to define the position of the sun and rightfully reasoned that it was about nine o'clock in the morning.

"That proves that I slept all night," he said, half aloud. "Wonder what the folks at home think of my absence? Mother must be dreadfully worried."

Joe had not forgotten his old-time whistle, which had been used so many times when out hunting. Now he whistled several times, as loud as he could.

At first no answer came back, but presently, from up the western shore of the island, a faint whistle came in return.

"It must be Fred," he cried, joyously, and started in the direction as rapidly as his rather stiff limbs would permit. Then he whistled again and now the answering signal came back quite plainly.

"Fred, where are you?" he called out.

"Here I am," was the reply, and in a few minutes more he came face to face with his chum. Fred was bound hands and feet, and although he had tried to liberate himself he had found the task hopeless.

"When did you get around, Joe?"

"Not a great while ago."

"Weren't you tied up?"

"Yes, but I managed to loosen myself. Wait till I cut those ropes." And getting out his knife Joe set his chum free immediately.

"Say, but I feel rank," came from the stout youth. "They drugged us for fair, didn't they?"

"They certainly did, Fred. I wonder what has become of them?"

"I don't know. When I woke up I was all alone and I've been alone ever since."

"Let me cut you a stick." Joe did so. "Now then, if they attack us again there is going to be fun, eh?"

"Right you are. I'd take great pleasure in laying out the fellow who put us to sleep. What do you make the time to be?"

"About nine o'clock."

"Nine o'clock? Why, the sun is shining!"

"I mean nine o'clock Saturday morning."

"Great mackerels! Joe, you're joking?"

"No, I am not."

"Do you mean to tell me that I've been asleep from yesterday afternoon to this morning, eight o'clock?"

"That's about the size of it. I guess that fellow gave us all we could stand. If he had given us more maybe we shouldn't have woke up at all."

At this reply Fred gave a shiver. "Don't talk like that. It gives me icicles on the backbone. Now we are free, what are we to do?"

"Get home, just as fast as we can."

"That's easily said. We haven't any boat."

"Well, we have got to get to the mainshore somehow, Fred. Remember, our folks must be dreadfully worried about us, and then that base-ball game——"

"That's it! We must get back in time for that game by all means! I wouldn't miss it for a farm."

"If some sailboat chanced to come past the island we might hail those on board."

"Do you know of any place where we would be likely to pick up a rowboat, or an old canoe?"

"No, but I know where we can pick up a few logs," added Joe, suddenly. "We might build a raft and ferry ourselves over to the main-land."

"Then let us do that."

Both were hungry, but the most they could find to eat were a few huckleberries. Had they had

time they would have gone fishing for food, but just now every moment seemed precious.

Joe led the way along the shore, and it was not long before they came in sight of half a dozen logs, which the waves and wind had washed up during the Spring freshet.

"We ought to be able to build a raft with these," said Fred. "The trouble is, we haven't any nails."

"Run back and get those ropes you had around you, Fred. I'll cut some good, strong vines and branches," answered Joe.

They worked over the raft the best part of half an hour, and even then the craft did not suit them. But they had done their best and were glad to note that when shoved into the lake the raft floated quite evenly. Then they cut two thick branches for sweeps.

"Now for a life on the ocean wave!" cried Joe. "All aboard for London and Paris!"

"Don't you get funny on that raft!" came warningly from the stout youth. "The first thing you know you'll upset us both."

They had taken off their shoes and stockings

and tied them over their shoulders. With trousers rolled up, they shoved off from the island, and the uncertain voyage to the mainland was begun.

"This is a regular Robinson Crusoe way of getting there," was Fred's comment, as they used the sweeps with caution.

"I don't care, if only we do get there, Fred. They meant to keep us from playing that game; we must do all we can to thwart their little trick."

"Well, we are doing it. But this tree branch isn't an oar or a paddle and this raft isn't a naphtha launch."

"I'd like to know what has become of the fellows who took us over to the island."

"Oh, they are back to Lakeport, most likely—that is, if Dan Marcy dares to show himself there. I'll wager Si Voup thinks he has a dead sure thing of the game."

"No doubt of that. And he will certainly have it easier than if we were there. Harry will have to reorganize the whole club."

They were about one-quarter of the distance to

the mainland when the raft began to wobble and threaten to go to pieces.

"We ought to have bound the logs tighter together," grumbled Fred.

"I don't believe we need so many," answered Joe. "Supposing we let some of them go? Then we can bind what remain so much tighter together."

One log was already loose and they let it go, and then undid another on the opposite side of the raft. While they were using the ropes to bind what were left Fred uttered an exclamation of dismay:

"My sweep!"

"What of it?"

"There it goes!"

The sweep was only a few yards away, but it drifted further and further and they could not get it, try their best. The raft now appeared to be coming apart all over.

"It looks to me as if we'd have to swim for it," observed Joe. "Shall we turn back to the island? It's closer than the mainshore."

"I don't know," answered the stout youth doubtfully. "I don't want to get a cramp——"

"Not much, Fred! We'll go back."

They were just turning when they heard a shout from up the lake, and looking in that direction saw Joel Runnell approaching in a cat-boat. The old hunter had been out fishing and had quite a mess of the finny tribe in the bottom of his craft.

"Hullo, there, wot ye doin' on a raft?" he sang out.

"Come and take us on board!" ejaculated Joe. "Hurry up!"

Hearing this, the old hunter lost no time in turning in their direction, and in a few minutes more they were safe on the cat-boat.

"I'm awfully glad that you came along," said Joe. "Take us to the mainland just as quickly as you can, will you?"

"To be sure, if ye want it, Joe. But what's up?"

"We have been kidnapped," was the answer, and while the cat-boat moved for the mainshore both Joe and Fred told their story.

"It must have been Marcy and Si Voup," declared Joel Runnell. "I saw them coming from the island early this morning. Just as I was starting out to fish. The third fellow was a stranger to me. He had light, yellowish hair."

"It must have been Ike Boardman!" cried Fred. "His hair is just that unusual color."

"Wot are ye a-goin' to do about it when ye git back?" continued the old hunter.

"I don't know yet," said Joe. "The main thing is to get back in time for that baseball game."

"When does the game come off?"

"Three o'clock."

"Humph! you'll have a right smart hustle to git to Lakeport by three o'clock," said Runnell, after consulting his watch. "Might do it if ye had an extry fast nag, or one of them steam launches."

"I was thinking I might hire a horse over to Dotter's farm," came from Fred.

"Don't think ye can."

"Why not?"

"I saw Dotter drivin' up to Brookside early this

morning. He had two horses hitched to his wagon, an' I don't think he has any more'n that."

At this both Joe and Fred gave a groan.

"I don't see what we are going to do," said the stout youth. "We can walk to Perry's, but it's a good mile and a half, and even after we get there he may not let us have a horse. He's a peculiar man to deal with, so my father says."

"Well, we have got to do something," said Joe, desperately. "We must get to Lakeport, hook or crook, by three o'clock!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE GREAT GAME.

When Joe did not come home at the hour expected nobody was greatly surprised, his folks thinking that he and Fred had been detained. But as it grew later and later Mrs. Westmore began to worry.

"What can be keeping Joe?" she said to Harry. "Did he say anything to you about coming home so late?"

"No, mother, he said he would be home about supper time, or directly afterwards."

Another half hour went by, and then Mr. Rush dropped in on the Westmore family.

"Thought I'd step over to see if Fred was here," he explained. "I told him to come straight home."

"He isn't here, Mr. Rush, and neither is Joe."

The Westmores were talking it over with their visitor when the doorbell rang and a farmer named Hiram Salter presented himself.

"Good evenin', Mrs. Westmore," said the farmer. "I found the store shut up, so I thought I'd come to the house. I've got a letter for you."

As he spoke he handed out a slip of yellow store paper folded in the form of a letter. On the slip was scrawled:

"We have been detained and won't be home until nearly noon to-morrow. It's all right, so don't worry. J."

"P. S.—Send Mr. R. word."

"That's a queer note," was Mr. Rush's comment. He turned to the farmer. "Where did you get it, Mr. Salter?"

"Got it from a feller who stopped my wagon when I was a-drivin' into town. He asked me to leave it here an' gave me ten cents. It was so dark I couldn't make out who he was."

"Oh, I guess it is all right," came from Mr.

Westmore. "They are going to stop over with some of their boy friends."

The farmer went off, and presently the Westmores retired. But Harry was not satisfied, and it was a long time before he could go to sleep.

"Joe said he would be on hand the first thing to-morrow morning to put the club through its final practice," he reasoned. "He ought to be home to-night getting a sound sleep. He can't rest quite as well in a strange bed."

By nine o'clock on Saturday morning Harry had finished up his chores and he also did the work generally assigned to his brother. Every moment he looked for Joe, and when the clock struck his face took on a gloomy look.

"Hullo, there!" came from the fence, and the next instant Link leaped the pickets and walked across the garden. "All ready for the great game?"

"Yes, I am ready, but I don't know about Joe. Have you seen Fred this morning?"

"No, he isn't home."

"He and Joe went off yesterday. They were to come back in the evening, but sent word that they were going to stay over until nearly noon to-day. I don't like that much."

"Humph! neither do I. It will break up our practicing."

"Well, we've got to do the best we can."

By ten o'clock all of the members of the club but Fred and Joe were at the clubroom, and a little later they marched to their grounds. In the absence of Joe, Link, who was a fairly good pitcher, was put in the box, and the shortstop, Matt, was placed behind the bat.

Harry felt that he must do his best with the team, and he coached them all he could, and explained to them certain new signs he and his brother had been talking over. As each minute went by all of the players looked for Joe and Fred, and when the saw-mill whistle blew twelve o'clock and the practicing came to an end each looked at the others in a doubtful manner.

"I may be mistaken, but I think something has gone wrong somewhere," was Bart's comment.

"I don't think Joe and Fred would stay away like this of their own accord."

"Neither do I," answered Matt. "Something serious has happened to delay them."

"My father said there was a fire last night up in the direction of Hollow Cove. He said it looked to him as if it was a barn. Maybe Joe and Fred went to the fire, or maybe it was at the place where they were stopping and they stayed to help."

The boys scattered for dinner, agreeing to meet at the clubroom at one o'clock or a little after. On the way home Harry ran into Si Voup, who grinned at him.

"Well, I suppose you are about ready to take your defeat this afternoon," said the captain of the Excelsiors.

"We'll take what comes," returned Harry. "Perhaps your club will be the one to lose."

"Rats! I'll bet you five dollars we win."

"I don't bet, Voup."

"You're afraid you'll lose," sneered the captain of the rival club.

"No, I am not. But I don't bet, and that is all

there is to it," and with this remark Harry walked off.

"Won't he be worried when the time comes to open the game," muttered Si Voup to himself.

Voup and Boardman had returned to Lakeport in high feather over the success of their plot against Joe and Fred. Marcy was also in town, but keeping shady. Each of the three was putting up his money on the Excelsiors, confident that, with Joe and Fred out of the game, the Lakeports could not possibly win.

Both the Rush family and the Westmore family were much disturbed over the prolonged absence of the two youths, and after dinner Mr. Rush said he would drive up to Hollow Cove to see what had become of them.

"If you find them bring them back just as quickly as you can, Mr. Rush," said Harry. "We need them on the baseball team."

"I suppose you do, Harry. I will do my best."

"If they don't show up I don't know what we are going to do."

"Haven't you enough players?"

"Oh, yes, but Fred is our best catcher and Joe our best pitcher. With them out of the game we won't stand near as good a chance of winning."

Promptly on time the members of the Lakeport Club assembled at the room. The first question asked by each was concerning Joe and Fred.

"This is the worst blow yet!" cried Bart. "If they don't show up what in the world are we to do?"

"All we can do is to put Link in as pitcher and Matt as catcher, and then rearrange the rest of the players," answered Harry.

"I'll do my best," said Link. "But I must say I thought Joe would be here to do the twirling for us."

"So will I do my best," added Matt. "But you all know Fred is the best catcher in Lakeport."

"If I knowed where to look fer 'em, I'd go after 'em red-hot," came from Teddy Dugan.

"Maybe we'd all go after them," said Walter.

It was not long after this that a number of

friends came up to the clubroom. When it was announced that Joe and Fred were missing many looked glum.

"And to think that I just bet Boardman two dollars that the Lakeports would win," said one of the visitors.

"Boardman and Voup are betting all around," said another visitor. "I never knew they had so much money. And somebody said Dan Marcy was around and that he was betting on the Excelsiors, too."

"Do they know that Joe and Fred are missing?" asked Walter.

"I don't know, but they will know it as soon as we appear on the ball field."

The various players consulted their watches every few minutes and it was plainly to be seen that some of them were nervous. All had depended upon Joe and Fred to pitch and catch.

"Let us go back of the shop and practice," said Link to Matt, and they went down and Link did his best to get his arm into proper shape for the great game.

"This, in one way, is a chance for us," observed Matt.

"True, Matt, but I'd rather see Joe on deck—not but what I am willing enough to pitch. I shouldn't care if it was some other game than the one for the championship of our town."

"That's the way I look at it, too."

At last it got so late that Harry called the club together. All were in their uniforms, and Harry directed that the suits belonging to Fred and Joe be taken to the little dressing room under the grand stand at the grounds.

"They may show up at the last minute," said he, "and if they do they won't have time to come up here and dress."

The game for the championship of Lakeport had been widely advertised and the ball grounds were already beginning to fill up when the club arrived there. The grand stand was packed.

"Gracious, what a crowd!" murmured Bart, as he looked around. "I never saw so many people in Lakeport in my life!"

"And to think Joe and Fred are not here,"

groaned Frank. "It's enough to make one sick at heart."

The absence of the regular pitcher and catcher of the Lakeports was quickly noticed by scores of spectators and various were the comments in consequence.

"Where is Joe Westmore? I thought he was going to pitch."

"And Fred Rush was going to catch. I don't see either of them."

"Link Darrow is practicing with the ball, and Matt Roscoe is catching for him."

"Well, Link is pretty good, but not as good as Joe."

"You're right there, and they want the best battery they've got to-day, or they'll lose."

Swiftly the minutes flew by and still no Joe and no Fred. Harry held his watch in his hand almost constantly.

"It's no use!" he groaned at last. "We have got to start up the game without them!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A RACE AGAINST TIME.

THE moment the cat-boat bumped against the shore Joe and Fred leaped out.

"Can I do anything more for ye?" questioned Joel Runnell.

"I don't know of anything," answered Joe. "If we can't find any other way to get to Lakeport we'll have to walk it."

"And that will take us until after dark, and the game will be over," added Fred, with a groan. "Joe, our enemies have got the best of us, after all."

"Perhaps, but I am going to expose them for this, and don't you forget it!" said Joe, bitterly.

"Yes, but I'd rather be there and help to beat the Excelsiors."

"Oh, so would I."

The lake shore road to Lakeport was located some distance away, and, bidding Joel Runnell good-bye, they scrambled through the brushwood and over the rocks to get to it.

"If we could only locate a horse——" began Joe, when he heard a merry shout from up the road, and looking in that direction saw four fellows on bicycles coming along at a swift gait. As they drew closer they recognized George Dixon and Roy Willetts, of the Brookside Baseball Club.

"Hi! stop! stop!" cried Joe, and Fred joined in quickly. "Stop, Dixon! Stop, Willetts! We want to speak to you!"

"What's up?" came from George Dixon, as he slowed up after passing them and turned back. "Why, if it isn't Joe Westmore! And Fred Rush, too! I thought you were going to play ball this afternoon? We were going to Lakeport to see you."

"We were going to play," answered Joe. "We were carried away to Pine Island against our will, and we want to get back to Lakeport just as soon as we can."

"You'll lend me a wheel, won't you?" pleaded Fred of Roy Willetts.

"And I'd like to have your bicycle," said Joe to George Dixon. "I know it's rather cheeky, but I can't think of anything else to do."

"Carried to Pine Island against your will?" came from another rider, the four having surrounded Joe and Fred. "Do you mean you were kidnapped?"

"Yes. Don't you remember that old Dubber case? Well, this is like it."

"Humph!" came from George Dixon. "It's a shame! Well, you can have my wheel, Joe, and welcome. I can ride on behind Cass. Can't I, Frappy?"

"Sure."

"And you can have my wheel," said Roy Willetts to Fred. "I'll ride behind Al Lemming."

"We shan't forget your kindness," cried Joe, as he mounted the bicycle.

"That's all right. I only hope you get to Lakeport in time. We are late. That front tire doesn't hold the wind very well."

By this time Fred was also mounted, and side by side he and Joe made off down the road which led to Lakeport. The other boys, with their passengers, came on more slowly and were soon lost to sight behind a bend.

"This is what I call falling in with fortune!" cried Fred.

"That's true, Fred. But you must remember that we have a long and hard ride before us. We've got to go over Misson Hill."

But little more was said, for each of the boys wanted to save his breath. Each could ride well, which was in their favor. Along the road they spurted, avoiding the deepest of the ruts and the big stones. They often "took chances," but felt that, under the circumstances, this was necessary.

Inside of an hour they reached a farmhouse situated directly on the road. They knew the farmer well and, dismounting, asked if they could have a bite to eat.

"We are in a great hurry," said Joe. "But we must have something, as we haven't had anything since yesterday."

The farmer's wife gave them some bread and cold meat, and also some doughnuts and milk. She did not wish any pay, so they made her little girl happy by giving her a twenty-five cent piece.

"Now for home!" cried Joe, as he swung up on the saddle once more. "That lunch makes me feel as fresh as when we started."

"I'd like it better if my saddle was a little lower," said Fred. "But I'm not going to bother with altering it now."

Mile after mile was reeled off and still the two bicyclists kept at their tasks of diminishing the distance between themselves and home. Going up Misson Hill was hard work, especially for such a stout youth as Fred, and Joe had to slow up a trifle for his chum's benefit.

"This isn't going to do us any good when it comes to playing ball," puffed Fred.

"Oh, if we can only get there in time I'll compel Si Voup to give us time in which to rest," answered Joe.

The road down the hill was rather rocky and in one spot there was a steep incline.

"Look out there, Joe!" cried Fred, but the next instant both were flying down the incline at top speed.

All might have gone well had it not been for a washout near the bottom of the hill. This had left a deep gully directly across the roadway and when the boys struck this gully both went flying off their bicycles and into the bushes. The wheels were badly bent, and one of Fred's tires came completely off.

"Hurt?" asked Joe, as he managed to pick himself up.

"I—I don't know," gasped the stout youth. "Oh, what a tumble!"

"Look at the wheels!"

"That settles the question of riding, Joe. We are certainly booked to walk the other four miles."

"Four miles, and it's half-past two o'clock now!"

"That's true. But do you see any way out of it?"

"No. And another thing: What are we to

do with the wheels? We can't leave them here. We've got to have them mended for their owners."

"Maybe they'll be along soon."

"No, they must be miles behind us."

Both of the youths stood looking at the injured wheels in great perplexity. The bicycles weighed over twenty pounds apiece and they did not relish carrying such a load.

"Somebody is coming along the road in a carriage," said Joe, a moment later. "Perhaps he'll help us in some way."

The carriage was coming from the direction of Lakeport. Soon it was in sight and then Fred uttered a glad cry:

"My father!"

"Why, it certainly is!" ejaculated Joe. "Here is luck truly!"

"Hullo!" shouted Mr. Rush, as he came up in his buggy. "Where in the world have you two boys been?"

"It's a long story, father," answered his son. "Just now we'd like to get back to Lakeport as

quickly as possible. Will you take us, and take the wheels, too?"

"Certainly. It will be quite a load, but I reckon Dolly can manage it."

With the aid of a hitching strap, the bicycles were fastened to the back of the buggy, and then the boys hopped in beside Mr. Rush. The mare was turned around and touched up with the whip, and off they sped for home.

"This beats bicycling," said Joe. "It will rest us up for that game."

Mr. Rush wanted to know the particulars of the kidnapping and the boys told him all they knew.

"Those rascals should really be locked up for this," said the gentleman. "But the thing is to prove their identity. You can't say that you saw any of them."

"That's true, father," answered Fred.

"I suppose Si Voup looks at it as a good joke, but I can't see it in that light," went on Mr. Rush.

"Marcy must have done it just to make trouble for us," came from Joe. "He is awfully sore over the way he was treated last winter."

"Has Mr. Shale ever been able to connect him with the stealing of the *Sprite?*"

"No, that affair is still as much of a mystery as ever."

"I think it might pay to have Dan Marcy watched."

Dolly was a fast mare, and touching her up occasionally with the whip made her keep at a good speed. On and on they went, until from a slight rise of ground they could see the church spires of Lakeport.

"What time is it now?" asked Joe.

"Exactly twelve minutes of three," answered Mr. Rush, after consulting his watch.

"And how far have we still to go?"

"About a mile and a half, and then around to the baseball field. I suppose you want to go right over."

"Oh, yes."

"We haven't any suits," put in Fred.

"Never mind, we can send for them."

The buggy continued to rattle on, and at last they dashed into a side street of Lakeport. Then

they took a turn and made for the ball grounds. Joe looked back at the town clock.

"Four minutes of three!" he cried, triumphantly. "Won't our enemies be astonished to see us!"

"And won't our friends be glad!" added Fred.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE GREAT GAME BEGUN.

Harry was just giving his players their final instructions when a small boy came running toward them.

"You're wanted right away!" the boy whispered. "Your brother and Fred Rush want you!"

"What!" gasped Harry. "Where are they?"

"In the dressing-room under the grand stand."

"This is certainly a mystery!" came from Link, and he followed Harry to the dressing-room, and so did Matt. They found Joe and Harry getting into their uniforms with all possible speed.

"What in the name of goodness——" began Harry, when Joe stopped him short.

"Don't say anything now, Harry. Si Voup is responsible for it. I'll explain later. Are all the other fellows here?"

"Yes, but——"

"Si had us kidnapped. He doesn't know we are here. Fred and I want to surprise him."

"Oh! Well——"

"Tell the other fellows to take their old positions. After you are in position give a loud whistle and Fred and I will come out," went on Joe.

His brother and the others understood, and left the dressing-room as quickly as they had entered it.

In the meantime Si Voup, Boardman and the others of the Excelsiors were talking earnestly among themselves.

"We are going to have a walkover," said Voup.

"A regular cinch," declared Boardman. "I expect to win a lot of money on this match."

Nearly all of the members of the Excelsiors were elated to think that Joe and Fred had failed to appear. But only three or four were in Voup's secret, and all of these had bet heavily on the result.

The umpire was on hand and the toss-up gave

Lakeport the choice of innings. Without hesitation they sent the rival club to the bat.

"That's queer," murmured Si Voup to Boardman. "I should think they would keep off the diamond as long as possible, thinking that their old pitcher and catcher would appear."

"Maybe they are conceited enough to think that they can do as well with Link Darrow and Matt Roscoe."

"Well, if that's the case they will soon learn that they are mistaken."

Out on the field rushed the seven players of the Lakeport Club and took their respective positions. A short hurrah went up, but silence followed when it was noticed that the positions of pitcher and catcher were vacant.

"They must be going to throw up the game," thought Si Voup.

There was an expectant pause and then Harry gave a short, clear whistle. The door to the little dressing-room burst open and out ran Fred and Joe in their natty uniforms and took their re-

spective positions behind the bat and in the pitcher's box.

As soon as they appeared a yell went up which grew louder and louder.

"There they are!"

"They are going to pitch and catch, after all!"

"Wonder why they kept out of sight so long?"

When Joe and Fred ran out on the field, Si Voup and Boardman stared at them as if they were gazing at ghosts.

"It—it's them!" gasped Boardman.

For the moment Si Voup was too paralyzed to speak. He continued to stare at Fred until the latter walked over to him, adjusting his chest protector as he did so.

"Oh, you needn't stare so, Si Voup," he called out. "I am here, and so is Joe, and after this game is over we have an account to settle with you and Boardman and Dan Marcy!"

"You—you——" stammered Voup. He did not know what to say.

"Play!" called out the umpire, and Fred had to race back to his position. Si Voup continued to

stare at him and also at Joe, and then turned back to whisper to Boardman.

"We're caught!" he muttered, hoarsely.

"They didn't see us," answered Boardman, who was of a cooler nature. "Don't give yourself away. Make them prove everything." And on this the two agreed.

The buggy ride had given Joe and Fred a chance to rest, and each felt in perfect trim for the game. Both were on their mettle, and Joe determined to pitch ball as never before.

The first batter up was a tall, brawny fellow, the best hitter the Excelsiors had. He came to the plate with a swinging gait, confident that he could rap out a two-base hit if nothing better.

Joe measured the fellow with care and sent in a swift, low ball.

"Ball one!" cried the umpire.

Again the ball came in, this time rather high.

"Ball two."

"He is going to let the batter walk!" cried several. "He is afraid to give him a good ball."

Again Joe stepped back and gave Fred a certain

sign. The ball came on in a curve, directly over the plate.

"Strike one!" called the umpire.

"That's the way to do it, Joe," called a friend.

Again the ball was delivered. It looked fast but was slow, and the batter struck at it and missed it.

"Strike two!"

At this the batsman scowled and gripped the ash afresh. Joe gave him no time to think of what he wanted to do. In came the sphere with all the speed at the young pitcher's command.

"Three strikes—batter out!"

A wild cheering came from the Lakeport supporters.

"That's the way to do it, Joe! Strike out some more of 'em!"

The second man to the bat resolved to be careful and consequently he had two strikes called upon him almost before he was aware. Then he knocked a foul which Fred captured with ease.

The third player to come up was Boardman. He glared fiercely at Joe and then glared at Fred.

"Oh, you can't scare me, and you needn't try,"

said Fred, with spirit, and this made some people in the grand stand laugh.

The first ball to come in was high, but Boardman struck at it and missed it. Then he made a vicious sweep at the next ball and missed that likewise.

"Take your time, old man!" sang out Voup. "Make him give you what you want."

As a result Boardman allowed the next ball to pass him, although it was perfect in every way.

"Three strikes—batter out!" came calmly from the umpire.

"It was too high," growled Boardman, but his voice was lost in the cheering and yelling of the Lakeport rooters.

"Two of the best batters they have struck out in one inning!" came the cry. "The Excelsiors had better go home!"

When Fred and Joe appeared on the players' bench, a dozen or more wanted to know what had kept them away so long. They told their story in detail, and many were highly indignant at Voup, Boardman and Marcy.

"We ought to ride 'em on rails," said one man. "They deserve it."

"Tar and feathers would be better," came from another.

"Don't do anything until the game is over," said Joe. "We want to beat them, and do it in a strictly honorable way."

As of old, Walter Bannister was first at the bat, and after having two strikes called on him, he knocked a clean two-base hit to leftfield. This was a beautiful start, and Bart followed it up by a safe single which took Walter to third. Then came Fred with another single, and Walter came home, while Bart reached third.

"Hurrah! Lakeport scores the first run!"

"Two on base and nobody out!"

Fred was followed by Matt, who went out on a short fly to second. Then came Teddy Dugan, who was playing in Frank's place, Frank having gone off to Boston, on a visit to a rich uncle.

"Whack it good, Teddy!" was the cry. "Knock it over the fence!"

"Th' fince, is it!" ejaculated the Irish lad.

"Sure an' I'm goin' to knock it out av town, so I am!"

The ball came in swiftly, for Si Voup was mad. It was just right for Teddy, and by good luck he met it fairly and squarely and sent it bounding swiftly into centerfield, just over the second baseman's head.

"Run! run! Everybody run!" was the mad yell, and everybody did run, Bart coming in like lightning, followed by Fred, while Teddy reached second by sliding and grabbing the bag in such a fashion that he slid completely around the baseman.

"Two more runs!"

"And a man on second and only one out!"

"Who is betting on the Excelsiors now?"

Harry was the next to the bat and got first on four balls. Then came Joe, who also reached first, while Harry went to second. There was a mix-up with the ball at second, and in the excitement Teddy Dugan left third base and slid in at the home plate.

"Another run! Hurrah for Teddy Dugan!"

Joe was followed by Link, who knocked a foul into the third baseman's territory. Then came Paul with a fly to centerfield; and the exciting inning came to an end. Score, Excelsiors 0, Lakeports 4.

The cheering was deafening and lasted for several minutes. The supporters of the Excelsiors looked glum and hateful.

"What's the matter with you, Si?" asked one of Voup's friends. "They are knocking you all around the field."

"Oh, wait till the next innings," growled Voup.

"Well, don't wait too long. I've got money on your team, remember."

As soon as they came off the diamond, Voup called Boardman to one side.

"We mustn't let them win!" said the captain of the Excelsiors, fiercely. "If they win I'll be just about ruined!"

"I'm in the same boat. But what are you going to do?"

"I wish we could get at Joe Westmore or Fred Rush."

"There is only one way."

"How is that?"

"When Westmore comes to the bat you must deliver a swift ball and hit him in the side or the head. If you'll do that, when I go to the bat I'll step back and let Rush have it with the bat. Of course both of us can claim the accidents were unintentional."

"All right, I'll go you!" cried Si Voup, with blazing eyes. "Anything to make them lose the game!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE WINNING RUN.

In the next inning Joe managed to strike out two of the Excelsior players, and the third knocked a foul which the first baseman scooped in on the run. The Lakeports made another run.

"Keep it up and give them the worst drubbing they ever had!" cried a young man of the crowd, who had learned how Joe and Fred had been treated.

No runs were scored in the third inning, nor in the fourth. By this time the Excelsiors were furious and almost went to pieces entirely, so that at the end of the sixth inning the score stood: Excelsiors, 0, Lakeports 7.

"We are certainly going to have a walkover," said Fred to Joe. "It does my heart good to see it, too."

"I've got something in my mind," returned the captain of the Lakeports. "They thought they could down our club if we were missing. I know Link and Matt would like to try their luck at battery work. Why not let them?"

"Just as you say, Joe. I think they deserve the chance, since they were so willing to serve in the first place."

Joe talked the matter over with the others, and all were willing to let Link pitch and Matt catch for at least one inning.

This was scarcely decided upon when it was Joe's turn at the bat. As he walked to the plate Si Voup glared at him fiercely.

"I suppose he'd like to chew me up," thought the young captain of the Lakeports.

Voup made a certain sign to Boardman which meant that he was going to hit Joe. Then he stepped back, took aim, and threw the ball in with all his might.

It came directly for Joe, and so swiftly that the batter scarcely had time to do any thinking. Had he tried to jump back it would have taken him full

in the arm or side. But Joe did not jump back. Instead, he fell flat on the plate, and the sphere whizzed past him and also past the catcher.

"Run! run!" yelled the crowd to a player who chanced to be on first, and the player ran as hard as he could and reached third base before the ball was again into play.

"What are you trying to do, Voup?" was the cry. "Do you want to kill Joe Westmore?"

"He wants to hurt the Lakeports' pitcher!"

"The—the ball slipped," growled Voup, sourly.

"If the ball slips again, this bat may slip and hit you in the head," came from Joe. "I know your dirty tricks too well, Si Voup!"

With the crowd against him, Si Voup did not dare to attempt the trick again. He tried to strike Joe out, but could not, and the captain of the Lakeports got safely to first while the runner at third came home. But that was the end of the luck for that inning.

When Link took his place in the pitcher's box and Matt went behind the bat a little cheer went

up. Boardman saw he would have no chance to injure Fred.

"Hurrah! the Lakeports know they have won the game!"

"They are going to give the Excelsiors a little run for their money!"

"I think Joe and Fred deserve a little rest—they have done so well," said Mr. Monroe Corsen, with a smile.

"Oh, they have done splendidly!" said Laura Westmore, who sat near by. "I'm just as proud of them and of the others as I can be!"

"Now, take your time and don't get excited, Link," whispered Joe. "Even if they do get a run or two, it won't matter."

"I'll do my best," answered the new pitcher. "Of course, I don't expect to hold them down as you did."

The first player to face Link was a good batter, yet all he managed to get was a one-base hit. The next batter went out on strikes, and the crowd cheered lustily.

"Good for Link Darrow! He knows how to pitch, too!"

The next boy to the bat struck a short fly to left field and managed to get to first, while the other runner got to third. Then came a low ball between first and second bases. As will happen at times, it was missed by both the basemen, and before it could be secured the runner on third came home.

"One run for Excelsiors!"

"Keep it up, fellows!"

"Don't mind that, Link," said Fred. "You're doing all right."

Link bent to his work with a will and put the next man out on strikes, and again the crowd cheered wildly.

"Good for little Link Darrow!"

When the inning came to an end the score stood: Excelsiors 1, Lakeports 8.

"Shall I pitch any more?" asked Link.

"Certainly," said Joe. "I don't call one run much."

The Excelsiors were doing a great amount of talking among themselves, and presently another

pitcher was put up in Si Voup's place, while another catcher took Boardman's place.

"Hullo, they are sick of Voup and Boardman!" cried Harry. "Well, I don't blame them."

Strange as it may seem, everybody on the Lakeport Club but Harry had scored a run. Harry had gotten to first twice, and second base once, but nothing had been done to help him get home.

The new pitcher for the Excelsiors meant business. He was fresh and had a good delivery, and he retired the Lakeports with nothing more that inning than one base hit.

The ninth inning opened with the score still standing Excelsiors 1, Lakeports 8. By a combination of circumstances two runs were quickly scored, and then, by a fumble of the ball at second base, another run came in and two players remained at first and third.

There was only one man out, and the spirits of the Excelsiors rose wonderfully. Their friends yelled themselves hoarse.

"You've got 'em a-going! Keep at 'em!"

"Knock out a few home runs!"

Link called Joe up to him.

"Do you want me to continue to pitch, Joe?"

"Yes. It was not your fault that the runs came in. I was partly responsible, as you know. They seem to have a new lot of steam on."

Again came a base hit, and then a drive to short-stop which was just out of reach. Two more runs, and the Excelsiors fairly danced with joy.

"That's the way to do it, fellows. You have six runs now! Go after the other three!"

"Joe, you had better pitch," pleaded Link. "Perhaps you can strike them out."

"If you want me to, I'll do what I can," said Joe.

The Excelsiors had changed several players in the middle of an inning, so they could not complain of the action of the Lakeports. As Joe went into the box, Fred took his old position behind the bat.

"Hurrah! this winds it up for the Excelsiors!"

"Link Darrow is afraid to pitch!" sneered one of the rival players.

"I was only put in to give Joe a rest," an-

swered Link, calmly. He thought more of his club than he did of himself.

The Excelsiors watched every chance, and when a ball was dropped by a Lakeport player at second, one of the runners slid home. Then another run came in, and the score was a tie.

"A tie! A tie!"

"Keep at 'em! You've got 'em on the run!"

Two men were out. The best batter of the Excelsior club now faced Joe. In came the ball swiftly.

"One strike!"

Again was the ball delivered.

"Two strikes!"

With the ball in hand, Joe made a signal to Fred, for a slow drop. In it came, in a manner that was truly tantalizing to the batsman. He swung his bat savagely—and missed it.

"Three strikes—batter out!"

"Joe Westmore has struck him out!"

"Wasn't that pitching for you?"

With the score 8 to 8, the Lakeports came to the bat at the ending of the ninth inning. They tried

their best to score, but in vain. One player got to second and that was all.

"Nine innings and a tie!"

"This is a great game!"

"Now for the winning run!"

So the comments ran on. Everybody was wildly excited and all in the grand stand were on their feet, cheering their favorites.

The first to come to the bat in the tenth inning was Si Voup. With a face that was alternately flushed and pale, Joe faced his rival. He made up his mind he must strike out Voup.

He signaled a low curve to Fred, and sent it in with great force. Around came the ash to meet it.

"Strike one!"

Next Joe signaled a high inshoot and sent in the ball without delay. Once more Voup was fooled and only fanned the empty air.

"Strike two!"

"Take your time, Si!" called a friend.

Again the ball came in. It was such a good one, Voup did not dare to let it go by. He struck—and missed once more.

"Three strikes—batter out!"

"Hang the luck!" roared Si Voup, and threw his bat on the ground with great violence.

The next player went out on a foul to third. Then Joe steadied up once more and the third player went out on strikes as Voup had done.

"No runs this trip for the Excelsiors!"

"Now, Lakeports, see what you can do!"

"The winning run is what we want!"

It was Harry's turn to bat and he selected his ashen stick with care.

"Don't be in a hurry," cautioned Bart. "Make him give you the ball you want."

"I will," said Harry.

When Harry stepped to the plate he felt a curious sensation all over him. He seemed to be possessed of but one desire in life—to hit the ball and drive it just as far as possible.

Si Voup was again pitching—he had insisted upon going in the box, even against the wishes of many of his friends. He stepped back, made a signal to his catcher, and let the ball drive with all force.

It was the ball Harry wanted—he felt this the moment it left Voup's hand. With one step forward, he swung his bat, and crack! the ball went flying far down into centerfield, over the fielder's head and toward a clump of bushes bordering a ditch.

"Whoop! look at that!"

"Run, Harry, run!"

"You can get three bags on that with ease!"

"Oh, what a dandy hit!"

"Get the ball! Throw up the ball!" yelled the Excelsior players. "Hurry up!"

"Go on to third, Harry!" cried Joe. "Go ahead, you have plenty of time!"

Harry was already at first. Now he tore down to second like wildfire. Then up he went to third and slid in to the bag.

"Come home!" yelled Fred, and some others. "Come home! You have plenty of time!"

Harry looked into the field. The fielder was just preparing to throw the ball up to the second baseman. Away he started for the home plate, with the whole crowd yelling like a lot of demons.

Boardman was at the plate waiting for the ball, and now he stepped to his left—directly in the runner's path.

"Get out of the way, Boardman——" began Link, when Harry came in like a whirlwind, hurling the catcher flat. Then the ball came in—but it was too late.

"The winning run! Lakeport takes the game!"

Harry came like a whirlwind.

CHAPTER XXX.

AFTER THE GAME—CONCLUSION.

The excitement was intense, and in a twinkling Harry was surrounded and hoisted on the shoulders of his fellow-players.

"Hurrah for Harry Westmore!" was the cry.

"That run wasn't fair!" growled Boardman. "He had no right to knock me over."

"It was your duty to keep out of the way," said the umpire. "I saw what you did. It was a mean piece of business."

Nearly everybody who had witnessed the game agreed with the umpire. The Lakeports were congratulated on their victory, which made them the champions of the town. As soon as they could do so, the Excelsiors left the ground and hurried to their clubroom.

The feeling among the rival players was very

bitter. Nearly everybody blamed Voup and Boardman for the defeat. In return, the pitcher and the catcher blamed the others; and the upshot of the matter was that the Excelsiors disbanded.

As may be anticipated, Si was in trouble in more ways than one. He had borrowed money from Sidney Yates and from others, and this cash was all gone. Boardman was in the same fix, and the little they got out of the club receipts was only a drop in the bucket when it came to liquidating their debts.

On the Monday evening following the game, the Lakeports celebrated their victory in a becoming style. The clubroom was illuminated, and they had a garden party for their friends on Mr. Darrow's lawn, and the festivities were kept up until almost midnight.

During the week Mr. Rush took steps to have Si Voup and Boardman punished for what they had done to Joe and Fred. On hearing of this, Si Voup ran away and went on a visit to an uncle who lived in Boston. Boardman was found at his home, and broke down utterly when confronted.

"It wasn't my fault," he whined. "Si Voup put me up to it—Si and a young fellow named Dan Marcy."

"Marcy again!" mused Mr. Rush, and became more interested than ever. By coaxing and threatening he made Boardman tell his whole story, and then learned that Dan Marcy was stopping at a road-house to the east of the lake, at a place called Thompson's Corners.

"Did you ever hear that this Marcy took the sloop *Sprite?*" asked Mr. Rush.

"He never said so out-and-out," answered Boardman, "but I guess he did take the boat."

This was all Mr. Rush wanted to know, and he lost no time in calling on Mr. Shale and on Mr. Westmore. That afternoon the three men took a carriage and drove over to Thompson's Corners and to the road-house the catcher of the Excelsiors had mentioned.

As luck would have it, they found Dan Marcy on the porch of the house, half asleep in a chair. The fellow wanted to run away, but Mr. Shale collared him before he could do so.

"Not so fast, Marcy," said he, sternly.

"Wot do yer want?" growled the former bully of Lakeport.

"We want you," said Mr. Rush. "A fine job you have been putting up on my son and on Joe Westmore."

"Say, has them fellers been blabbin' on me?" ejaculated Marcy, angrily. The loss of all his money on the ball game had put him in a bitter frame of mind.

"I want you for stealing my sloop," came from Mr. Shale. "You needn't deny that you took the craft, for it will do you no good."

"I ain't denyin' nuthin," came from the bully. "Go on. You've got me, now do your worst. You can't git no money out o' me, for I ain't got none."

The landlord of the road-house had come out to listen to the talk.

"Who is going to pay me?" he demanded. "This chap owes me three dollars and a half for board."

"I don't know where you are going to get the money, Mr. Fells," answered Mr. Westmore.

As it was an extra warm day Dan Marcy was in his shirt sleeves, having left his coat and vest in his room.

"I'll see what he has upstairs," said Mr. Fells.

"Hi! let my clothes alone!" ejaculated Dan Marcy, in alarm. "Don't you touch a thing!"

But the landlord would not listen, and presently came below with the coat and vest in his hands.

"Four cents, two buttons, and a badge," said he, with a contemptuous snort. "They won't pay me."

He held up his find as he spoke. Mr. Westmore glanced at the badge.

"Hullo! the badge that was stolen from my store the time my money was taken!" he cried.

"Is that true?" questioned Mr. Shale.

"Yes—I'd know that badge out of a thousand. See, it has my initials on it."

"Then it must have been Dan Marcy who took your money."

"I remember he was in Lakeport at or about that time," said Mr. Rush.

In vain Dan Marcy tried to deny the evidence of

his guilt. Nobody would listen to him, and in the end he was made a close prisoner and driven off to the Lakeport lock-up. Here he tried to put the whole blame for carrying Joe and Fred off on Si Voup and Boardman, but nobody gave him any credit.

"He is a bad egg," said more than one. "He should have been locked up long ago." And in the end Dan Marcy was tried for his crimes and sent to prison for several years. Si Voup and Boardman escaped with severe reprimands and both promised to turn over a new leaf.

The victory over the Excelsiors gave the Lakeports an excellent reputation throughout the whole State, and they received challenges to play in many cities and towns. Harry took a really fine photograph of the club in uniform, and this was reproduced in several newspapers, much to the club members' gratification. All told during that season they played twenty-eight games, of which they won nineteen. Link pitched at four of the games, all of which were won.

"This has been the best summer in my life!"

declared Fred, when the season was at an end. "I can tell you what, boys, there is no sport on earth like baseball."

"Well, I like boating pretty well," said another boy. "I think it is about time we organized a boat club."

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